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PlayStation®
The Official Magazine

Are you hardcore enough for **DARK SOULS?**

DRAGON AGE II
The official verdict

SOCOM 4

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 44 (April 2011)

New secrets revealed

Ratchet & Clank

Friends...or foes? We put **All 4 One**'s co-op mayhem to the test!

Issue 044 April 2011

WE PLAYED IT!
The full report on Sony's next-gen portable

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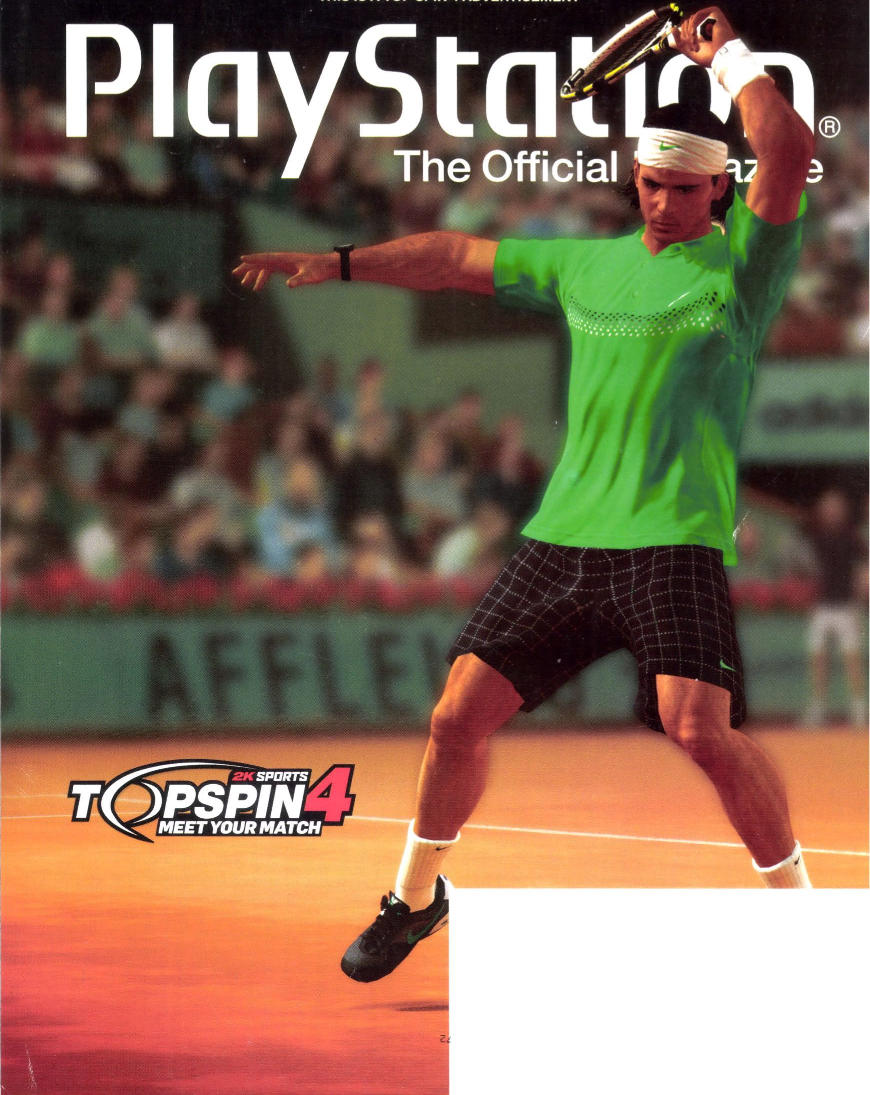
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The Official Magazine

APRIL 2011

COVER FEATURE

48 RATCHET & CLANK: ALL 4 ONE

It's hard to keep a dynamic duo down, and PTOM takes a world-exclusive look at Ratchet and Clank's triumphant return to PS3. Oh, and they've brought some friends and weapons aplenty.

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SOCOM 4
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Ratchet & Clank
Friends...or foes? We put All 4 One's co-op mayhem to the test!
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76 BULLETSTORM
As the game's name implies, there will be a hail, nay, a storm of bullets shot from guns. And instead of discussing the news of the day, we get to creatively massacre suckers in our way.

82 DC UNIVERSE ONLINE
Superheroes and supervillains clash in this mammoth online role-playing game.

Nice Touch

A surprise hands-on with NGP still has me smiling

It was late, and I was tired. The jetlag was starting to catch up with me, as was the hangover from the previous night's debauchery. Sure, I was initially elated over the big NGP announce, but that happened a few hours earlier. Right now, though, I'd just been ferried into a conference room in Sony's posh Tokyo headquarters after waiting in the lobby for a couple of hours, and I was hurriedly unpacking my iPad (with my questions on it), my voice-recorder, and my notebook, all while stealing furtive glances at the two white-gloved employees in the corner lovingly polishing a pair of NGPs while three other Japanese staffers were typing away on the other side of the long, rectangular table.

So you can understand why, when none other than SCE senior VP Shuhei Yoshida walked over to me, pointed to a different chair, and told me to "sit here," I hesitated. It didn't register. I continued to settle in, then, as I was about to drop into a chair two spots down, he said again: "Please. Sit here."

Mmkay, I thought. *Whatever.* I swept my assorted paraphernalia over, shuffled down, and sat where indicated.

Then it happened. One white-gloved gentleman moved toward me with the NGP.

"Wait," I said. "I'm gonna *play* it?"

"You have to play it if you're going to write about it," Yoshida said with a smile.

From that point on, I couldn't wipe the idiotic grin off my face—and it's back again as I'm typing these words. It's moments like this that remind me just how much I love this job.

GARY

Gary Steinman
Editor in Chief
twitter.com/TinyManRages

Gary Steinman

Editor in Chief

As with Duke Nukem, Gary Steinman does not want for asses to kick. He also has bubblegum to spare, and plenty of it. It tastes like awesome.

Greg Orlando

Executive Editor

ProTip: Never ask Greg Orlando about the time he knew a guy and that guy ordered chicken wings and got a fried-and-battered chicken head with his order.

Ken Bousquet

Art Director

Ken Bousquet makes everything he touches better. Yesterday, we handed him Pauly Shore's autobiography, and he turned it into *War and Peace*. No lie.

Roger Burchill

Managing Editor

How is Roger managing? The question has plagued humanity since we wrote it four seconds ago. And we may never know the answer until we ask him.

Scott Butterworth

Associate Editor

Recognized as the foremost authority on lumping suckas with doorknob-filled sacks, Scott Butterworth recommends paying up. Like, right now. With interest.

Anne Lewis

Editorial Intern

A juggernaut on the clog dancing circuit, young Anne Lewis brought polka and fire to the PTOM staff. Tomorrow, she promises to bring back the sun.

Christin Chi

Designer

Christin Chi knows of a clown house. Further, she knows its location. We are certain this will somehow be the death of us and, perhaps, of you too, dear reader.

BioTron 3710

Robotic Bio-Writer

Our all-new cyborg fembot was programmed only to write bios, so when she asked us "What. Is. Love?" we had to shut her down. It was the right thing to do.

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Inside Qore Episode 35

Let Them Eat Cake

Portal was already a triumph, and the follow-up adds new tools to the original first-person puzzler. This month, we drink straight from the spigot at Valve, revealing *Portal 2* gameplay, multiplayer mechanics, and more. Then we infiltrate *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs* developer, Zipper Interactive, and discover great additions to the tactical-shooter franchise. Want more punch? The *Mortal Kombat* relaunch packs the brutal flair you'd expect; Kratos even adds his knowledge of fatalities. And team-based FPS *Brink* vaults over others with its mid-fight parkour; you don't always need a portal gun for big stunts.

VERONICA BELMONT HOST OF QORE

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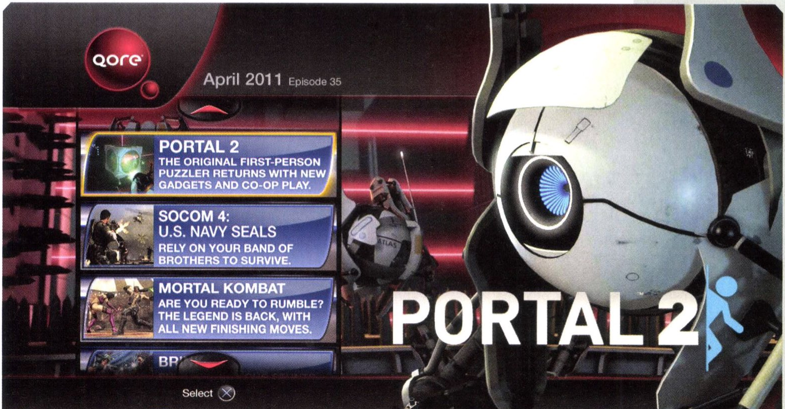

PORTAL 2
THE ORIGINAL FIRST-PERSON PUZZLER RETURNS WITH NEW GADGETS AND CO-OP PLAY.

SOCOM 4:
U.S. NAVY SEALS
RELY ON YOUR BAND OF BROTHERS TO SURVIVE.

MORTAL KOMBAT
ARE YOU READY TO RUMBLE? THE LEGEND IS BACK, WITH ALL NEW FINISHING MOVES.

Portal 2
Aperture Science runs you through more tests, but this time you can cheat off a friend in co-op.

SOCOM 4
Lock and load up with U.S. Navy SEALs squadmates in this tactical thriller.

Mortal Kombat
Get over here! The "fatality" creator picks a fight with newcomers on its return.

Brink
A floating city? Sounds like a vacation. Don't forget your sunscreen and Kevlar.

Upcoming Blu-ray and Games releases
Audrey sets her sights on the hottest Blu-rays this month!

Qore is free to PlayStation Plus subscribers.

Individual episodes can be purchased for $2.99 and a 13-episode subscription can be purchased for $24.99. Qore subscribers have access to Betas, demos, themes, and additional downloadable content each month.

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The PlayStation Entertainment Plan

Fill up your life with our monthly guide

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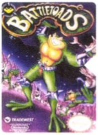


APR. 01

April Fool's Day

We thought about making a *Battletoads* joke, but then we thought ramming our faces into a meat grinder sounded like a better idea.

02

Marvin Gaye's Birthday

Marvin Gaye, helping babies get made since 1973 when "Let's Get it On" was recorded. For this, we are eternally grateful.

05

Mmm, Bacon

Babe: out on Blu-ray.

Game and Movie Night

Watch the movie or play the game? Do both with *Top Gun* and *Days of Thunder* hybrid Blu-rays also out today!

07

No Housework Day

Wait, this is only one day a year? That might explain why the people from *Clean House* keep trying to contact us.

08

Why Hello There, Starbuck

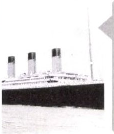
The sun doesn't shine as bright as it once did since *Battlestar Galactica* came to an end. But happy birthday, Katee Sackhoff.

12

PS3
MICHAEL JACKSON
APOCALYPSE

--

In stores: *MotorStorm: Apocalypse*, *Michael Jackson: The Experience*



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Titanic Struck the Iceberg

99 years ago the *Titanic* struck an iceberg and sank. Heed this cautionary tale of man's hubris.

15

First McDonalds Opened

In 1955 the first McDonalds opened in Illinois, and so, from an obese America: Cram it, Ronald McDonald.

18

Greg Orlando's Birthday

Greg wants us all to know he doesn't think he's above us. He puts his robot pants on one leg at a time, just like everyone else.

19

Killer Kombat

Get over here! Or wherever people go to pick up the latest in the *Mortal Kombat* line. Kratos expects high sales. Or else.

--

Also in stores: *Portal 2*

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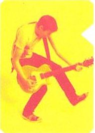
Easter

Ah Easter, the most terrifying holiday of them all for those amongst us (intern included) suffering from leporiphobia.



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Scott Butterworth's Birthday

Young Scott wants nothing less than praise, admiration, and lots of money for his birthday. But mostly lots of money.

28

Take Our Daughters to Work Day

We sincerely hope Roger brings his daughter in to work, because we wish to challenge her epic *Modern Warfare 2* skills.

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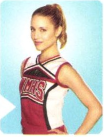
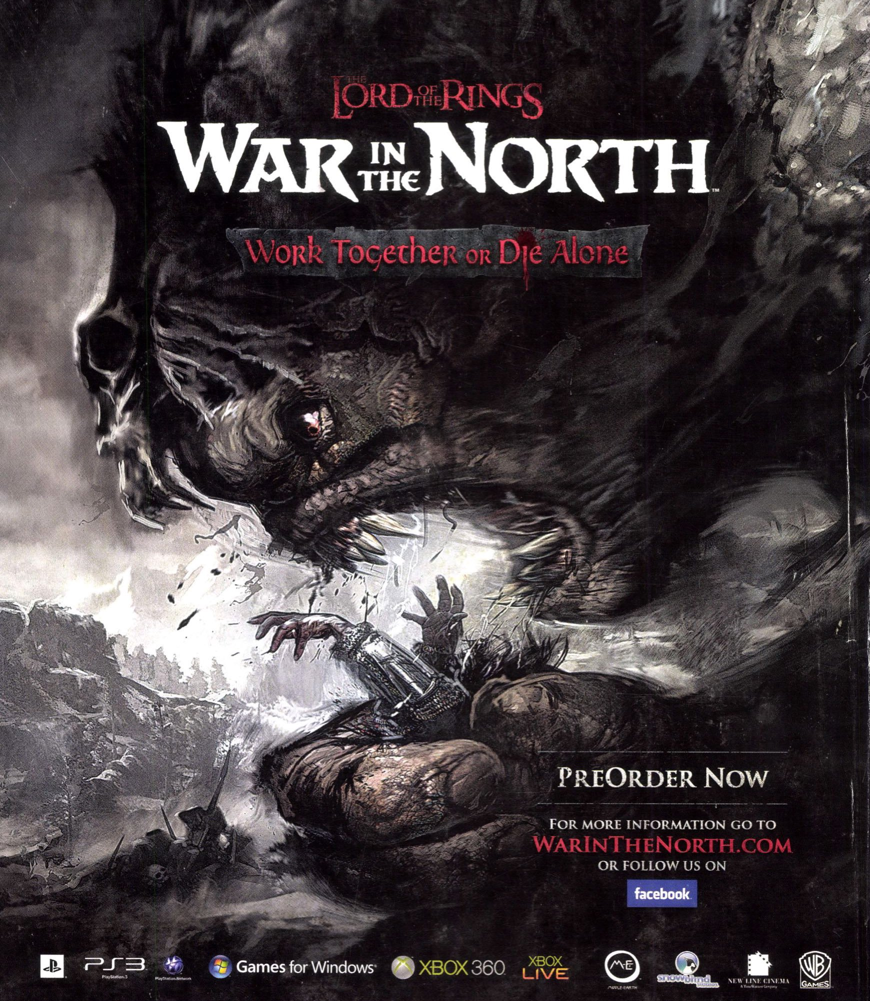
Sing It!

When *Glee's* Dianna Agron turns 25, do we sing to her, or does she sing to us?

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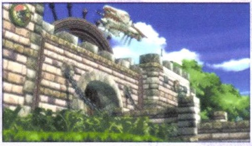

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

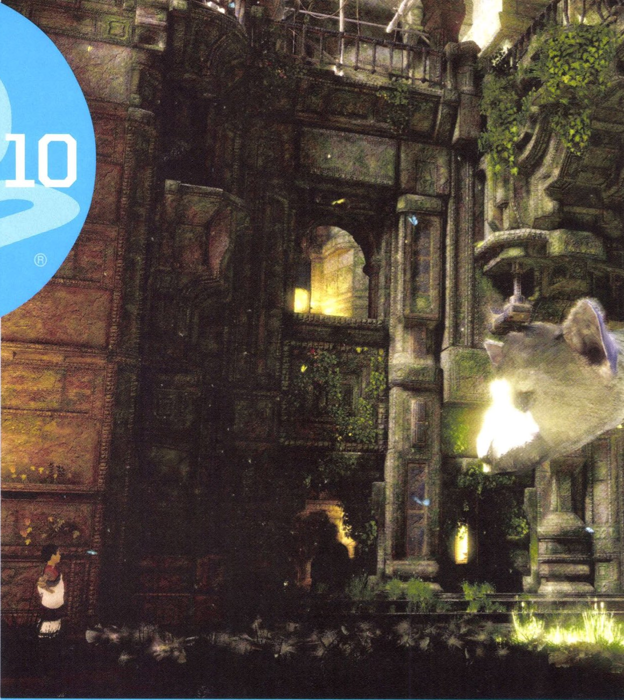
Dead SSXy
Time to rehit the slopes but, for the love of Pete, do not look down.
⏩Page 12

Suite Ecstasy
Finally, games really worth playing on smartphones.
⏩Page 14

Final Fantasies
Our oft-delayed Fantasies are finally becoming reality.
⏩Page 16

Leveling Up
Sack out with LBP2's best user-designed levels.
⏩Page 24

The Great Debate
Ew, gross. Please, not while we're eating, Dead Space 2.
⏩Page 26



1 Beyond Fun

In an exclusive Q&A, director Fumito Ueda reveals new details about The Last Guardian

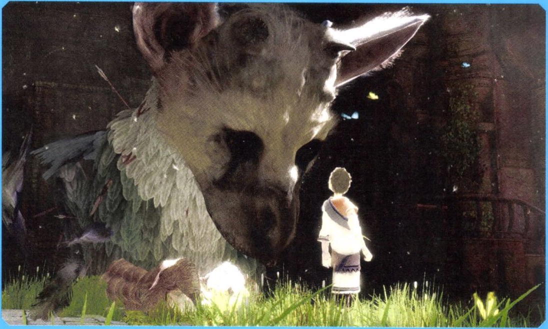
The Last Guardian appears to be a mix of *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*. Is that intentional?
Yes, that was the original concept. Both *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus* were on PlayStation 2, and now that we're on PlayStation 3, rather than find a new game mechanic, I wanted to take the things we'd already made and create something amazing on this new hardware with higher specs.

Which parts of each have you used?
Well, the Trico can move around autonomously, just like Yorda in *Ico*. And you could climb onto the monsters in *Colossus*, just as here you can climb onto the Trico. We've mixed those things together.

In *Ico*, if Yorda is left alone she becomes vulnerable to attack. Will the Trico face similar peril if you wander too far?
It's the opposite of *Ico*. The player's character doesn't have much strength, so it feels perilous to be alone. You'll feel safer with the Trico.

Can the Trico take damage or die?
Mmmm... Mostly not, no. The Trico is extremely strong within this world.

A boy and his bird-thing
The third title from Team Ico, *The Last Guardian* stars a young boy who must work together with an occasionally difficult griffin-like creature named Trico to escape from a ruined citadel. We'll have a full preview next issue.



The central relationship became a little more alien and a little less controlled in each game. With *Ico*, you have a boy and a girl. In *Colossus*, a boy and a horse. Now, with *Guardian*, there's a boy and a completely fictional creation. Is this a conscious progression?
I suppose there is a sort of progression, isn't there? I've always had an interest in the characters you'd be able to create on these wholly artificial devices, these consoles. It's not easy to explain, but it's using the computer as a tool for story expression, and seeing how far we can go. I'm interested in using the computer's power to create an engaging adventure story, or in artificial intelligence, and so on.

Does having a fantasy creature instead of a human help?
That also goes back to working around the limits of games—finding ways to feel more empathy for characters. With *Ico*, you had a boy and a girl, but they weren't able to speak with each other. If they were able to talk, I think that would've limited the effect of the story we told. It helped us gloss over a lot of details that we would've had to spell out explicitly otherwise. It's a similar idea here. I think this game retains that aspect of storytelling as well, since you can't speak with animals.

Unlike the first two games, there seems to be more people in *Guardian*.
I wouldn't say there's a great deal more; there were also other people in *Ico* as well, in the form of shadows. I think the people in *The Last Guardian* play a similar role to that.

Is the whole game set within a citadel?
Yes. But it won't all be indoors. There [just] won't be wide-open expanses for you to traverse like in *Colossus*.

So is *Guardian* more limited in scope or scale than the others?
The Last Guardian doesn't have a large cast, and the areas to access are also a bit limited compared to *Shadow*. However, just because the space is smaller doesn't mean there are fewer things to do; if anything, there's a much larger density of information. It's a lot deeper.

Do you ever worry that your games might be too emotionally challenging?
Certainly, I make games so that I can create a moving experience for the player. I'm not aiming to create just your typical videogame, but a form of entertainment that happens to be delivered via computer technology. People rate games in terms of how much "fun" they are or how much it allows them to blow off steam or whatever—and I think such games are important, of course—but I want to try to go beyond that and attract a broader audience to this genre of entertainment.

2 Get Real

SSX: Deadly Descents keeps snowboarding as over-the-top as ever

Snowboarding classic *SSX* is back—but not how we expected. Almost everyone who played the PS2's stunt racer fell under its spell of vibrant cartoon characters, exhilarating level design, endless replayability, and sheer exuberance. So naturally EA's debut trailer for *SSX: Deadly Descents*—with its lack of candy-striped grind rails and exploding piñatas—was met with an, er, icy reception. But the more we learn about the game, the more we begin to feel *Descents* might not be the massive betrayal its early imagery suggested.

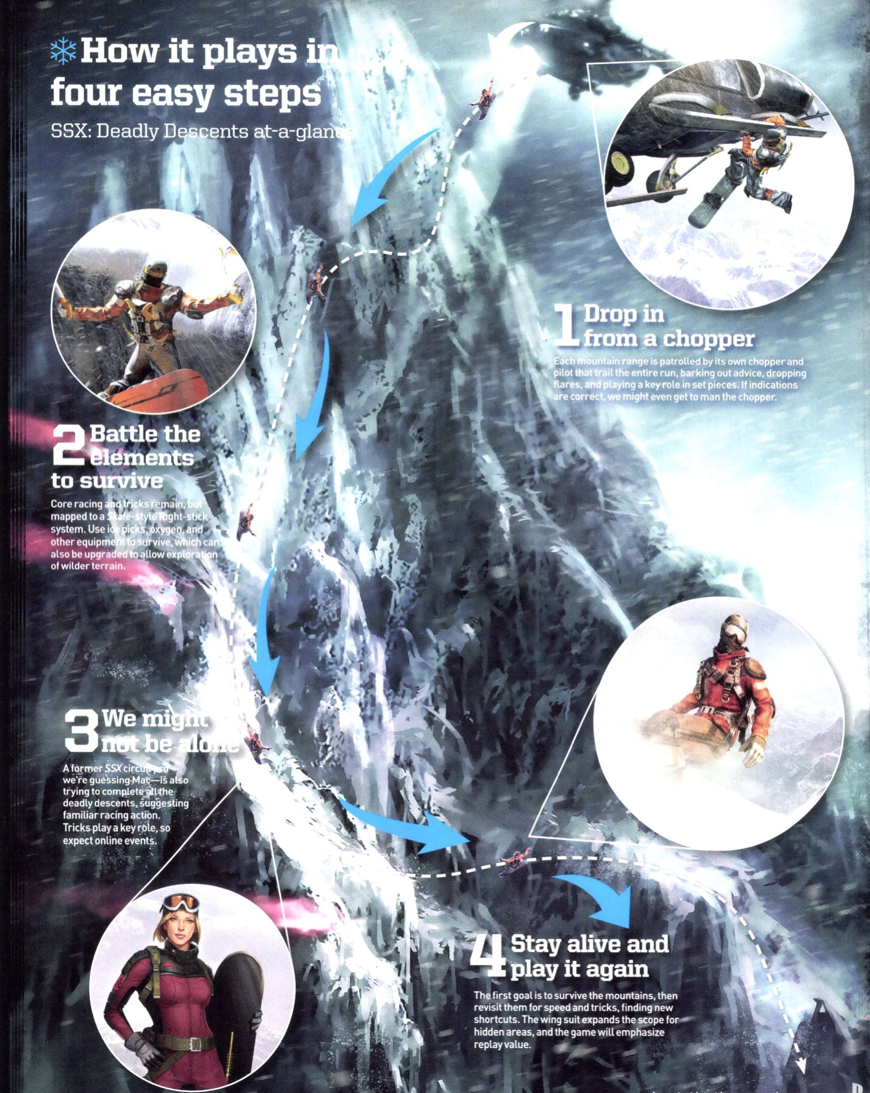
"We're looking at this as a reinvention, but retaining what made *SSX* great," says *Descents'* creative director Todd Batty. "*SSX* had this amazing casual candy bar wrapper, but inside was this amazing hardcore gameplay experience with tons of depth. We want to deliver what *SSX* players absolutely love, just change the wrapper, so it sits a little bit better on PS3."

So the focus remains firmly on tricks, racing, and fun. But developers have also added the moderately pressing challenge of *not dying*. Players will battle it out on nine real-world peaks (painstakingly mapped using NASA topographical systems) each with its own unique environmental challenge such as freezing cold temperatures or deadly avalanches. "The battle with the elements will be this game's version of the flashing lights and fireworks," Batty says.

With a full year left in development, we're sure to learn plenty more about *Descents* before launch. In the meantime, here's a look at how it plays.

How it plays in four easy steps

SSX: Deadly Descents at-a-glance



1 Drop in from a chopper

Each mountain range is patrolled by its own chopper and pilot that trail the entire run, barking out advice, dropping flares, and playing a key role in set pieces. If indications are correct, we might even get to man the chopper.

2 Battle the elements to survive

Core racing and tricks remain, but mapped to a *Skate*-style Right-stick system. Use ice picks, oxygen, and other equipment to survive, which can also be upgraded to allow exploration of wilder terrain.

3 We might not be alone

A former *SSX* circuit pro—we're guessing Mac—is also trying to complete all the deadly descents, suggesting familiar racing action. Tricks play a key role, so expect online events.

4 Stay alive and play it again

The first goal is to survive the mountains, then revisit them for speed and tricks, finding new shortcuts. The wing suit expands the scope for hidden areas, and the game will emphasize replay value.

verizon
MOTOROLA

Classic PSone games like *Dino Crisis* may be a couple of console generations old, but the experience will be generations ahead of most current smartphone games.

3 Suite Move

Three reasons why we're excited about PlayStation Suite

1. Classics On the Go

We've all got smartphones (well, everyone except for PTOM's Greg Orlando, who still prefers his 1977 beige rotary phone), and we've all enjoyed the cavalcade of compelling yet glorified mini-games that have graced these phones. But the dearth of core gaming content on our mobiles has left us a bit cold. As part of the PlayStation Suite initiative, Sony Computer Entertainment will be mining its extensive PSone catalog and converting these games to operate on Android-enabled devices. If that means *Dino Crisis* on a Droid or *Xenogears* on an Xperia Play, we're already sold.

2. PlayStation Certified

Sony isn't stopping with its back catalog. It's also planning to support and "certify" new games, providing development help and quality assurance. The goal is to offer "PlayStation quality" games in a hardware agnostic (albeit Android-only) environment. We applaud the effort to elevate the quality of new mobile and tablet games, but we do have one question: Will Sony be willing to release new PlayStation Certified games at the prices we've come to expect?

3. More Is More

Having a fully stocked library of PSone classics and new PlayStation Certified games isn't just a boon for smartphones and tablets. This entire catalog will also be fully compatible with the NGP, offering more choice for nostalgia buffs and gamers seeking new experiences. Even better, gamers can buy a title once for their smartphone and then install it on a NGP as well, at no extra cost!

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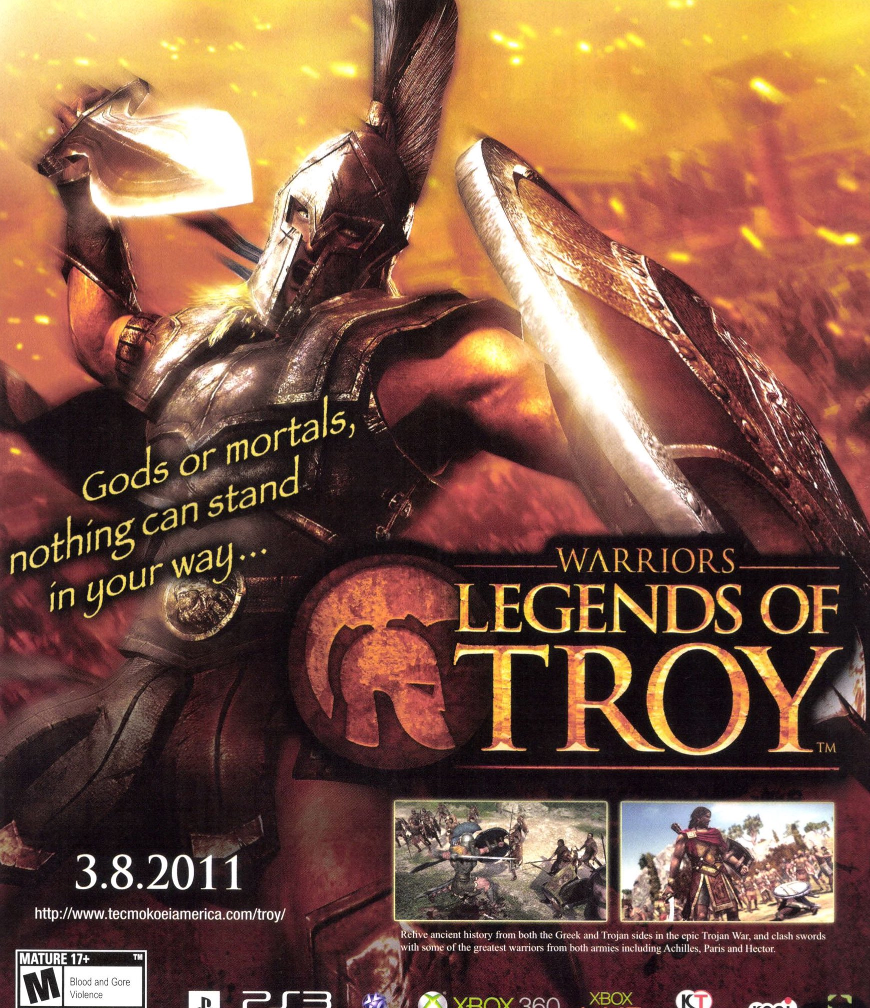

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4 Lightning Strikes Twice

Square Enix reveals Final Fantasy XIII-2, sheds light on spin-offs

Because it's not enough that no fantasy is ever quite final with Square Enix, now the powerhouse RPG developer also aims to prove it can't keep a good hero down. The recent surprise announcement of *Final Fantasy XIII-2* brings female protagonist Lightning back into the spotlight, complete with a new armored, feather-clad look. This darker, moodier sequel to *Final Fantasy XIII* begins on Gran Pulse after the events of the original's climax, but also flashes back to show new perspectives on the *FFXIII* timeline.

FFXIII focused on the dichotomy of its two opposing worlds: the technological utopia of Cocoon and the wild frontier of Pulse. The sequel reveals the universe has a *third* world—an invisible world of the dead—and Lightning's quest focuses on finding a way to enter that world. The only new character revealed so far is a mysterious man who appears to be either an antagonist or rival, but Square Enix has also confirmed some characters from the first game will return (our fingers are crossed for the pistol-toting Sazh Katzroy).

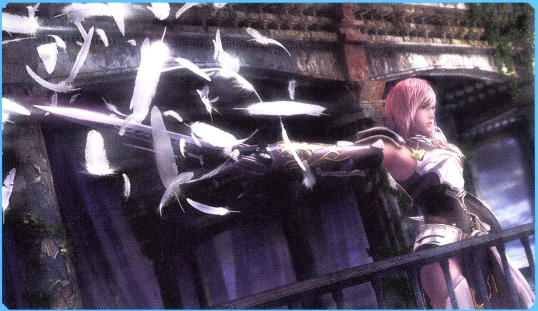
Gameplay details are limited, but early word on the battle system indicates it'll be an evolved form of the Active Time Battle system from *FFXIII*; that said, Square Enix is still in the process of deciding the ultimate structure of the game based on feedback from *FFXIII*.

Crystal Unclear

Most surprisingly, *FFXIII-2* is set to release next winter, which seems awfully quick given that we've been waiting for two other games in the *XIII* family since 2006—*Final Fantasy Type-0* (formerly known as *Final Fantasy Agito XIII*) and *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*. *FFXIII*, *Agito*, and *Versus* were all originally grouped together as part of the *Fabula Nova Crystallis: Final Fantasy* series, despite all three games taking place in different universes.

The first PSP title to span two UMDs, *Type-0* has a nebulous Japanese release date of this summer, but we still don't know when it will appear in the U.S. We're most excited about its battle system, which sounds like it takes cues from the stellar *Crisis Core: Final Fantasy VII*. Rather than menu-based combat, actions are mapped to the face buttons to give it a faster-paced feel. Each teammate specializes in a specific type of combat, so the battle system is strongly party-oriented, and it supports up to three players in multiplayer mode. The world introduced in *Type-0* is brand-new too, so it should be exciting to explore new territory in possibly one of the last epic releases on PSP before Sony launches its NGP.

And then there's the enigma that is *Final Fantasy Versus XIII*, a game that still has no release date. Gameplay details are hazy, but it's similar to the hack-and-slash combat of the *Kingdom Hearts* series. The story is particularly intriguing, since it draws heavily from modern-day influences. Protagonist Noctis is at the heart of a resource war among nations, and the contrast between the modern vibe of his own wealthy country and the medieval feel of the poorer nations mirrors the contrast between contemporary first- and third-world nations. Some areas are even based on real-world locations—the Basilica in Venice and Tokyo's Shinjuku district have both been spotted in the game's various screenshots.



In *Final Fantasy XIII-2*, those damn pigeons will finally face the harsh punishment they deserve.

Final Fantasy XIII-2 brings Lightning back into the spotlight...

5

Downlow-d

The next seven PSN games we want in 2011, and what to play until they drop

Many PSN games seem to appear out of thin air to steal our precious free time and digital dollars, but as we burrow deeper into 2011, we've amassed a sizeable list of downloadable titles we're jazzed about. Here are seven we think are well worth keeping an eye on, as well as what current downloads to play in the meanwhile to satisfy those PSN urges.

Journey

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

What is it? A mysterious and ambitious adventure from thatgamecompany, the creators of PSN favorites *flOw* and *Flower*.

Why we're excited: *Flower* captivated us with its beauty and subtle narrative cues, and *Journey* looks to do the same. Many questions remain about this gorgeous, desert-set voyage, but we love the online approach, in which two players can cross paths at any point and work together without the need for lobbies or voice chat, or without even seeing each other's PSN ID.

Pass the time with *Flower*. It's an amazing example of how minimalist game design can maximize a player's emotional connection.

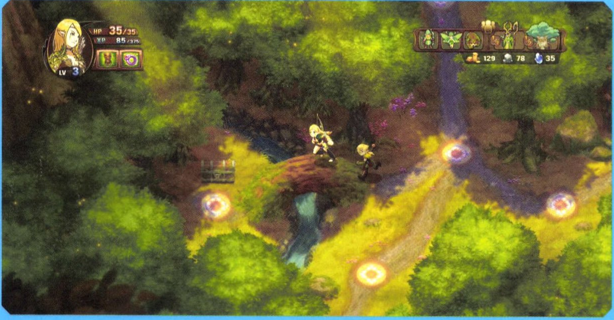
Mega Man Universe

Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**

What is it? The Blue Bomber takes some cues from *LittleBigPlanet*, letting players create and share custom stages online.

Why we're excited: *Mega Man Universe* is primarily based on old-school classic *Mega Man 2*, albeit with a modernized makeover, but we're mostly pumped about concocting our own devious challenges and unleashing them on the world. Plus, in addition to multiple versions of *Mega Man*, Ryu from *Street Fighter* and Arthur from *Ghosts 'n Goblins* are playable in the game.

Pass the time with *Mega Man 9* and *Mega Man 10*. Both will prepare gamers for *Universe's* classic, tough-as-nails platform gameplay.



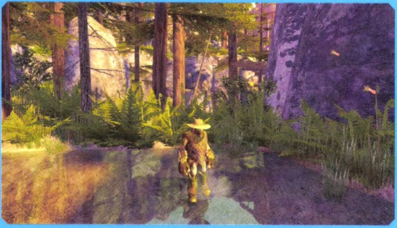
Might & Magic Clash of Heroes

Pub **Ubisoft** Dev **Capybara Games**

What is it? A pairing of puzzle and role-playing elements with stunning hand-drawn visuals, courtesy of *Critter Crunch* developer Capybara Games.

Why we're excited *Might & Magic: Clash of Heroes* started life as a very well-received Nintendo DS strategy/puzzler, but this HD remake infuses the addictive turn-based puzzle approach—set amid a fantasy role-playing game quest—with a fantastic new visual punch that absolutely pops off of the screen. Numerous gameplay tweaks also make for a more balanced and enjoyable experience.

Pass the time with *Critter Crunch*, the great, anime-stylized original puzzler that sees an orange furball swallowing a variety of colorful creatures.



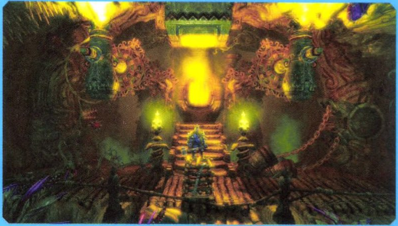
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath

Pub **Just Add Water** Dev **Just Add Water**

What is it? A visually updated version of the much-loved 2005 action-adventure. *Gravity Crash* developer Just Add Water is tackling the HD version.

Why we're excited The PS2 version of *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath* was canned. However, the wait will be rewarded with reworked visuals, extra content, and remastered dialogue.

Pass the time with *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* and *Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus*, a pair of PSone platform favorites available from the PlayStation Store.



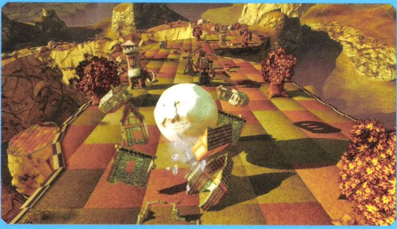
Trine 2

Pub **Atlus** Dev **Frozenbyte**

What is it? The sequel to 2009's fabulous-looking cooperative platform adventure, now with the much-desired addition of online play.

Why we're excited *Trine* captured hearts with a fleshed-out three-player experience and stunning visuals. The sequel tweaks the great parts, while bringing the co-op play online.

Pass the time with *Trine*, if you haven't already conquered it; otherwise play *Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light* for another solid co-op experience.



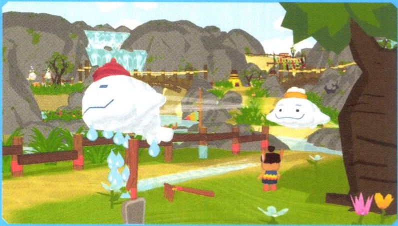
Rock of Ages

Pub **Atlus** Dev **ACE Team**

What is it? An action-oriented take on the tower defense genre where giant rolling boulders are used to crush their way through enemy fortresses.

Why we're excited *Rock of Ages* has an odd premise and an eccentric look—no surprise coming from ACE Team, devs of quirky PC game *Zeno Clash*. Players set up obstacles to slow the momentum of an oncoming boulder to protect their fortress entrance.

Pass the time with *PixelJunk Monsters*. It's a very different type of tower defense game, but it's also one of the best PSN games around.



Okabu

Pub **HandCircus** Dev **HandCircus**

What is it? *Okabu* is a colorful action and puzzle-solving experience from HandCircus, maker of the hit *Rolando* series on iPhone.

Why we're excited We love HandCircus' iPhone games, so we're excited to see what they do with a new, original concept on PS3. *Okabu* offers a cartoonish open world with a co-op campaign in which cloud-riding creatures use environmental objects to solve puzzles.

Pass the time with *LocoRoco Cocoreccho!*, the hyper-adorable PSN spinoff of the PSP series that clearly inspired the aforementioned *Rolando* series.

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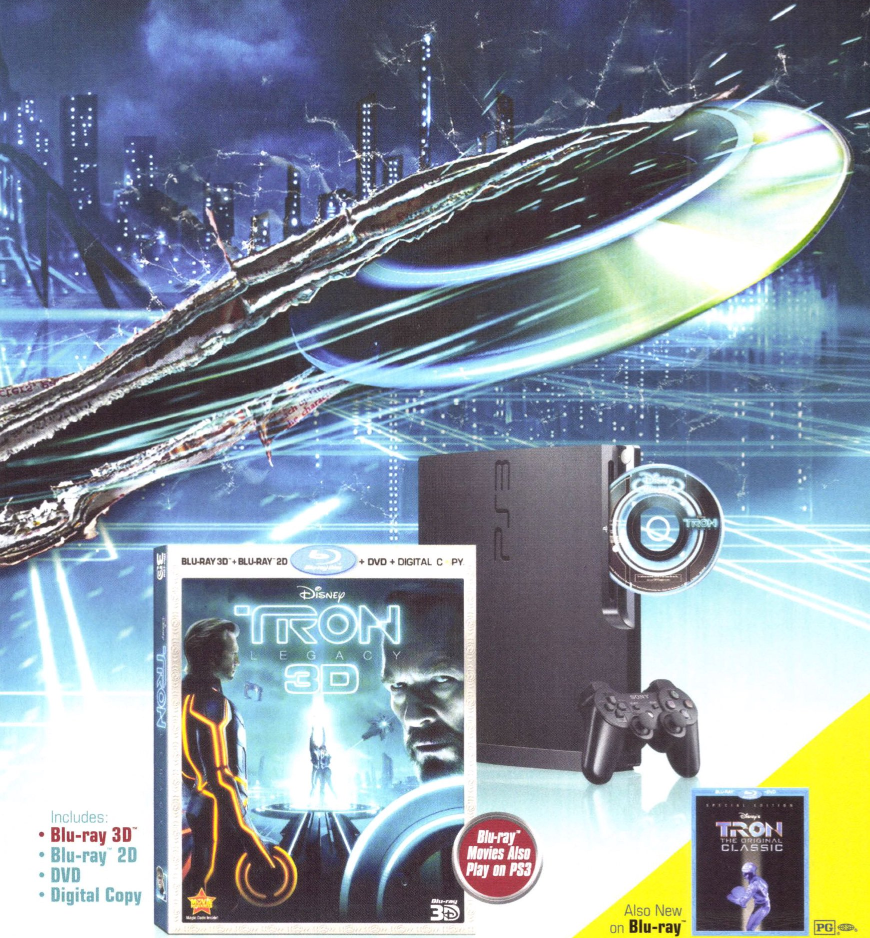
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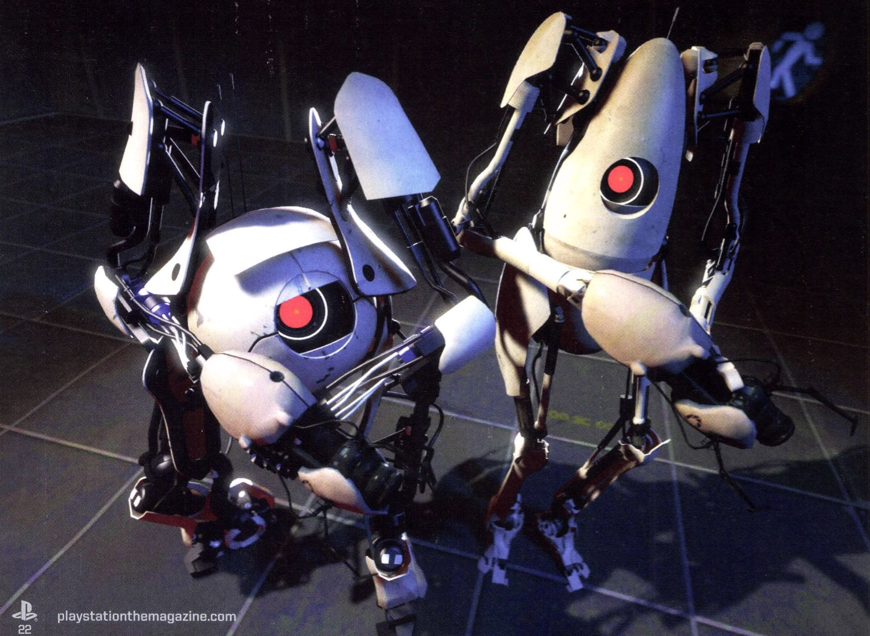
6 Portal Too

Valve blasts an inter-platform portal between PS3s and PCs

Valve boss Gabe Newell's E3 2010 announcement that the PS3 would be getting its own version of Steam (the developer's acclaimed online delivery service) was exciting, but nobody really understood why at the time. Now we do: cross-platform multiplayer. Beginning with *Portal 2*, PS3 gamers will be able to play cooperatively with PC players and keep a copy of game saves on Valve's servers—allowing greater freedom of access. And the best part: We'll be able to download either the PC or Mac version of the game for free if we've bought it on PS3. We'll even be able to chat with Steam friends who are on computers.

As for *Portal 2*, it's looking like one of the year's most exciting prospects. With two separate story modes—one for single-player and one for co-op—it's bigger than the first game, with expanded dialogue, story, set-pieces, and puzzle mechanics. Single-player sees silent *Portal* star Chell returning to battle the criminally insane GLaDOS, while multiplayer features two new heroes (Atlas and P-Body, pictured below), who look like advanced, sentient versions of the first game's turrets. We can't wait.



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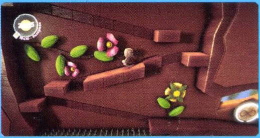
7 Five must-play LittleBigPlanet 2 levels

We played thousands of mediocre user-created levels so you don't have to

Hunting the elusive Trophy

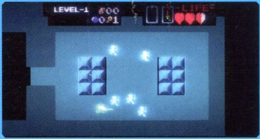
After the flood of "Trophy levels" that made earning *LittleBigPlanet's* Trophies a cakewalk, *LittleBigPlanet 2* has wised up—which hasn't stopped some creators from promising instant rewards. Of the new levels we've tried, though, only one really delivers: "easy pins and trophies for *LittleBigPlanet 2*" by Shadowman117. It's sketchy, sure, but it's also a moderately fun, no-nonsense way to rack up rewards in a hurry.



The 2nd Li'l Platformer

Creator: Ruof

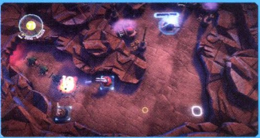
It doesn't push any boundaries, and it's not terrifically challenging, but this level's big draw is the way it introduces new obstacles by reshaping itself in inventive ways. Chunks of the level fly around and alter their properties as if by magic, and if the design flair inspires more creators to go the extra mile with their levels, so much the better.



Classic Zelda 1-1

Creator: Bluetonberry

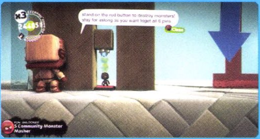
While we'd normally want to praise more original efforts, Bluetonberry's near-perfect re-creation of *The Legend of Zelda's* first dungeon—complete with functioning tools, hidden secrets, a working map, and an overlaid menu screen—is too impressive to ignore. True, it's an imperfect replica of a nearly 24-year-old game, but as the work of amateurs using level-creation tools goes, it's remarkably impressive.



Galactic Base Defence - 1.3

Creator: Urbandevill

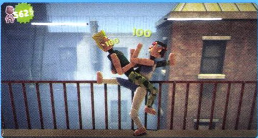
Creating top-down levels is one thing, using them to create functional tower-defense games is quite another. This level features four maps of varying size and difficulty, but the goal in each is the same: place and upgrade weapon turrets to stop waves of bug-like monsters from reaching the base. That it works is impressive—that it's a lot of fun is even more so.



How not to make a level

Creator: Malteseassassin

Think of this one as *LBP2's* missing tutorial. Every would-be creator should take a tour through Malteseassassin's thoughtful example level, which lays out a few basic Do's (design your own creatures and objects) and Don'ts (don't make horrible, haphazard platforms out of ugly materials). It's not always the most entertaining level, but it's easily one of the most useful, making its points in funny, memorable ways.



Super LBP Fighter II Turbo - Tournament Edition

Creator: Hymanator

While they may not have the sophistication of its *Street Fighter* namesake, the Super LBP Fighter levels—both by Hymanator—are fun in a make-marionettes-awkwardly-fight kind of way. The Tournament Edition level raises the roster of playable characters to eight, with some of their *Street Fighter*-inspired special moves intact.

8 Sword Play

Team Ninja's Yosuke Hayashi slices and dices on Ninja Gaiden 3

For the most part, the elusive *Ninja Gaiden 3* remains expertly concealed in the shadows, but our recent chat with project lead Yosuke Hayashi gave us a few clues about what to expect when it eventually emerges—like the fact *Gaiden 3* is going to get up close and personal with longtime protagonist Ryu Hyabusa.

"We are focusing on Ryu as a dark Japanese hero," explains Hayashi. "There won't be new playable characters, but we will focus more deeply on Ryu Hyabusa's life and lifestyle and feelings and thoughts."

Hayashi went on to explain that the game seeks to explore what a lifetime of violence can do to a person, allowing players to experience both the sensation and the physical and emotional toll of cutting someone down with a katana.

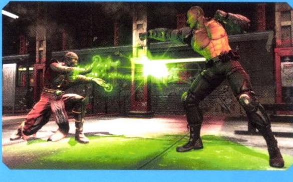
"We are trying to take the violent concepts even deeper and make people realize how it feels to actually kill someone and what it is to actually gut someone," says Hayashi. "It's very important to us that people realize that violence is not only about blood and gore."

Grittier gore isn't the only change Hayashi promised. He also stated the game design will be all new and should be more accessible to new players. "We know that many fans feel good about the difficulty level, but we are taking a slightly different approach. It's not that the game is going to be easier—nothing like that. It's just that we are trying to make a whole game, a more exciting game that can be enjoyed by anyone. But at the same time, hardcore gamers will be able to feel and appreciate what the series is about."

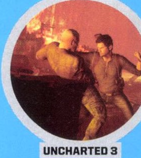
Among Hayashi's other promises: *Gaiden 3* will feature a "complex multiplayer mode," and the 360 and PS3 versions will launch simultaneously. As for the possibility of a Move-controlled katana... Well, that remains a ninja's closely guarded secret.

9 The Readers' Most Wanted

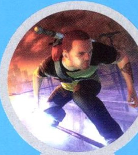
David Jaffe will be pleased. His *Twisted Metal* continues to crash its way to the top of our charts, only held back from the No. 1 slot by the furious fists, feet, and all other weaponry offered by *Mortal Kombat* (which, as we revealed, now features a cameo from another Jaffe creation, *God of War's* Kratos). Meanwhile, Sony games dominate the top 10, with only a trio of third-party offerings squeezing in. Good taste, PTOM readers. Fine choices, indeed.



01 *Mortal Kombat*
02 *Twisted Metal*
03 *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*
04 *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs*
05 *Batman: Arkham City*
06 *Resistance 3*
07 *inFamous 2*
08 *MLB 11: The Show*
09 *F.E.A.R. 3*
10 *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*
11 *Ico/Shadow of the Colossus Collection*
12 *Dragon Age II*
13 *Mass Effect 3*
14 *Max Payne 3*
15 *Duke Nukem Forever*
16 *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Future Soldier*
17 *L.A. Noire*
18 *The Last Guardian*
19 *Portal 2*
20 *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*



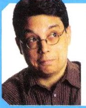
UNCHARTED 3



INFAMOUS 2

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of OTX Research. All games are PS3 titles scheduled to release after March 1, 2011. Polling period was Jan. 23, 2011, to Feb. 5, 2011.

10 Is Dead Space 2 too gory, gross, and gruesome?



Yes
Says the scion of sensitivity
Greg Orlando

Welcome to Electronic Arts' version of *life sucks, wear a helmet*: *Dead Space 2* has a scene wherein the protagonist Isaac Clarke takes a javelin-firing gun, carefully aims it under his chin, and fires. The game lingers on the gruesome scene, showing the man's wrecked, bloody visage impaled by a spear.

No one expects a horror game hero to skip through the forest to meet his woodland pals for a delightful picnic. Games should have blood, they should show death, and we needn't fear the frank portrayal of realistic violence. What we should fear, and what we should always be mindful of is when violence becomes mean-spirited and excessive, when game developers seem to take abundant joy at dismemberment, disfigurement, and human suffering.

Electronic Arts and the game's developer, Visceral Games, made a conscious decision to show what happens after a human takes a loaded javelin gun, sticks it under his chin, and pulls the trigger. Was it necessary? Did the developers think someone might wonder if the hero would somehow survive a javelin shot from a gun at point-blank range? Or did someone just (thoughtlessly) think, *"Hey, this is a cool, gory death!"*

Horror is cerebral. Sometimes, the scariest stuff is the stuff we leave to our imaginations. Electronic Arts would do well to learn this lesson. As it stands, its exploration of gore and extended violence is not so much horrific as it is a recipe for a lost lunch.

No
Says the bloodlusting brute
Scott Butterworth

Damn right they thought it was a cool death! You know why? Because it *was*. Gruesome deaths are a celebrated and long-standing trademark of the horror genre. To call ultra-violence unnecessary is to miss the point entirely. While some people might squirm or recoil at the sight of simulated violence, others simply can't look away. Morbid fascination? Perhaps. But it isn't necessarily based in a mean-spirited desire to see harm inflicted on others.

Scenes like Isaac Clarke's javelin eating contest are so unreal they border on comical. A fan's reaction to such gratuitous displays generally resembles a sort of cringe/laugh hybrid. Typically we're not drumming our fingers together while grinning sickly at the sanguine spectacle and muttering, "Mmm, yes, yes... more!" I mean, sometimes.

Laughing at a horrific death may sound mildly sociopathic, but this is where that hard line between fantasy and reality comes into play. This isn't genuine human suffering we're talking about—it's polygons and pixels. The vast, vast majority of gamers can distinguish between the two, and to suggest otherwise is perhaps more disturbing than the content itself.

Dead Space 2 is a brilliant game—for reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with blood and gore—but like spicy food and *Family Guy*, it's not for everyone. But a person who purchases a mature-rated *horror* game (whose predecessor featured a severed hand on its cover) probably won't mind.

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PlayStation®
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Previews

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **April** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Zipper Interactive**

SOCOM 4 U.S. Navy SEALs

EXCLUSIVE SHOTS
PlayStation

Changing the face of squad-warfare

Leaping from an exploding building and firing a machine gun is something we expect to see in *Die Hard*, not in a *SOCOM* game, but that's exactly why *SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs* is so surprising. Zipper Interactive is dragging its famous tactical warfare-based franchise out of the past and pulling it viciously into the present. The notion of change may frighten series veterans, but make no mistake: This is still absolutely *SOCOM*, and multiplayer is the reason why.

Confronting Conflict

SOCOM: Confrontation, the franchise's first foray onto PS3, revealed the series' inherent problems, and developer Slant Six's modifications to the aged, clunky control scheme marred the situation further. *SOCOM 4* developer Zipper Interactive isn't stubbornly perpetuating antiquated inadequacies. Rather than adhere to what worked 10 years ago, the development team aims to turn *SOCOM* inside out.

In trading tradition for contemporary familiarity, *SOCOM 4* looks and plays like a standard, even generic third-person action game—at least initially. Objective-based matches in large areas filled with scattered cover points encourage an aggressive playstyle that's wholly unlike the stealth-centric series. Much as we enjoy stalking the shadows in a large-scale multiplayer match, it's hard not to get caught up in the running and gunning.

This isn't a bad way to play *SOCOM*; it's just different. It's nice to see the series breaking free of its own constraints like this, but after a few multiplayer matches it dawned on us: ▸▸

Quick Pitch

Modernized
Cover, blind fire, destruction: New DNA gives *SOCOM* new life.

Traditional
Slow, stealthy, and methodical: *SOCOM's* classic elements still remain.

Renaissance
The developers reworked the controls and promise to learn from past games' mistakes.

One of the things they teach in SEALs school is helicopters are dangerous.

This isn't the only way to play, nor is it the way it was necessarily *meant* to be played. It's simply one way to go about getting things done. We're adamant about sticking with what we know, and if this is *SOCOM*, then why are we playing it as if it's *Call of Duty*?

Slow the Showdown

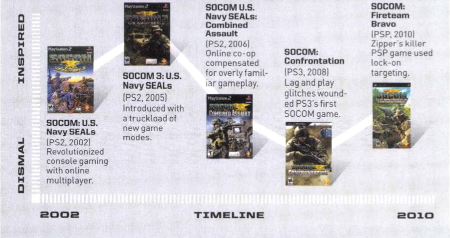
When we slowed our pace and started sneaking, *SOCOM 4* suddenly felt like a modernized version of what we've adored since the first game's release in 2002. This was never clearer than during no-respawn Suppression matches. The one-and-done team deathmatch mode is still the best way to play—but its the original objective types that'll considerably extend *SOCOM 4*'s online multiplayer legs.

Last Defense modifies the "capture the control point" variant that's become standard in nearly every online shooter. Rather than holding three control points until the enemy's respawn tickets run out, the team controlling all objectives gains access to the enemy's hidden base—and no, it's impossible for us to find their HQ without first completing our capture objective. Playing as the losing team here is perhaps more exciting than steamrolling the opposition; it was intense and chaotic as we desperately tried to hold off waves of assaulting human players.

This twist on traditional multiplayer

"Ready to lead, ready to follow, never quit." If only all gamers shared this motto with the SEALs...

Timeline The ups and downs of SOCOM



SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs
(PS2, 2002)
Revolutionized console gaming with online multiplayer.

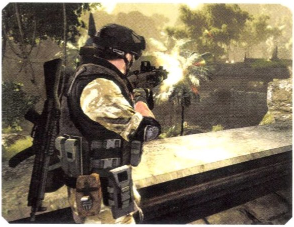
SOCOM 3: U.S. Navy SEALs
(PS2, 2005)
Introduced with a truckload of new game modes.

SOCOM U.S. Navy SEALs: Combined Assault
(PS2, 2006)
Online co-op compensated for overly familiar gameplay.

SOCOM: Confrontation
(PS3, 2008)
Lag and play glitches wounded PS3's first SOCOM game.

SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo
(PSP, 2010)
Zipper's killer PSP game used lock-on targeting.

War. As we understand it, war never changes. Or does it? The answer is maybe.



Navy SEALs are exlusively male and trained in amphibious tactics. They first saw action as SEALs in Vietnam in the 1960s, and have as their motto, "The only good day was yesterday."

Taking cover is a smart idea. Rushing guys in good cover is a terrible idea.

Tucking into cover isn't a guaranteed means of staying alive

modes applies to Bomb Squad as well. Rather than simply sprinting to the mission site, dropping the bomb and diving for cover, the defending team needs to escort and cover a bomb technician (a high-profile target, naturally) as he tries to defuse the attackers' explosive device. The gigantic, vertically tiered maps present plenty of opportunities for snipers to pick off the red-wire-cutter, whose demise subsequently assigns a new player with the stressful job. We'll be sticking as close as we can to protective barricades such as vehicles, semi-truck trailers, and concrete barriers to save our skin here.

Talk It Out

Tucking into cover isn't a guaranteed means of staying alive though. We found ourselves moving between cover points more often than we spent time lingering. Rockets and grenades made short work of protective walls, so we never truly felt safe.

This becomes a problem for antisocial players during cooperative matches. The custom co-op campaign, which lets us string four maps of varying enemy density and difficulty together, demands teamwork and communication. With five players running amok, the amount of angry, rocket-propelled-grenade-toting bad guys seeking to destroy everything increases significantly.

This is where we suspect the *SOCOM* faithful will find their comfort zone. The series' slow and methodical pace is as important here as it is in competitive multiplayer, but co-op is a more intimate experience. We're anticipating plenty of friendship-ruining games as someone slips and alerts the entire enemy army. It's mildly disappointing that we won't be able to roll through the single-player game with four friends, but this open-ended approach to creating our own cooperative campaign is what has us most excited about *SOCOM 4*.

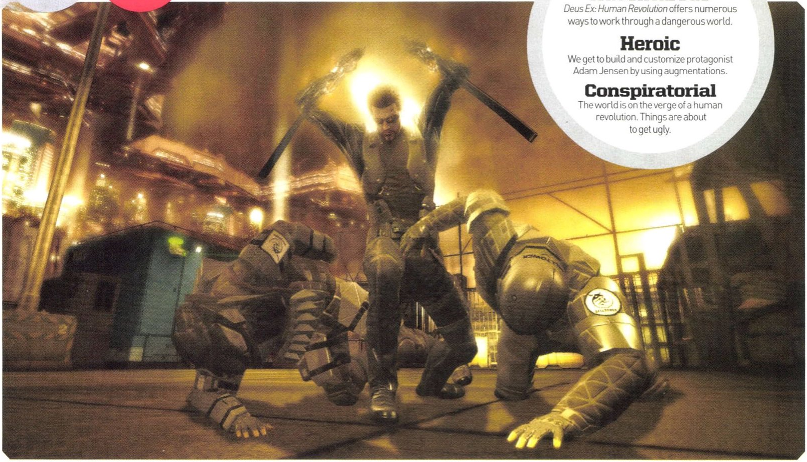
Past and Present

Taking *SOCOM*'s decade-old fundamentals and aggressively modernizing them could have been a recipe for disaster, but Zipper is on course to pull it off. Multiplayer accommodates these clashing playstyles to create advantages and disadvantages for both sides. Indeed, *SOCOM 4*'s most impressive feat isn't its fresh ideas or customizable co-op campaign. It's that it succeeds in providing a modern take on a familiar style spawned across two console generations. MITCH DYER

Dev Talk

"SOCOM's been around for nearly a decade. It's time to contemporize it, to push the boundaries, and make it a little bit more... extreme."

Travis Steiner
Lead Designer



Adam Jensen becomes more than human after a brutal assault.

Quick Pitch

Adventurous

Deus Ex: Human Revolution offers numerous ways to work through a dangerous world.

Heroic

We get to build and customize protagonist Adam Jensen by using augmentations.

Conspiratorial

The world is on the verge of a human revolution. Things are about to get ugly.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2011** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Eidos Montreal**

Deus Ex Human Revolution

We all want to change the world

The original *Deus Ex* put forth a bleak future. For its prequel *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*, the developers at Eidos Montreal want to present a world that's at once more hopeful and less bleak—yet still firmly entrenched in conspiracy and a sense of impending doom. "It's not the end of the world," says art director Jonathan Jacques-Belletête, "but you can see it from here."

We're sneaking. It's best to sneak in *Revolution*, at least until protagonist Adam Jensen's genetic augmentations allow him to perform competently in shootouts. We're creeping down a long corridor, one patrolled by pro-human, anti-augment goons. Our mission is to secure a secret weapon and, if we can find them, rescue some hostages.

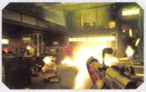
We introduce the first goon to Jensen's fist. Takedowns in this first-person role-playing shooter can be performed with lethal force or with an eye toward knocking a foe insensate; each stylish stealth assault shows Jensen in the third person as he bends limbs, socks faces, and chokes out the opposition. Now, we have to move the body to a safe location. Patrolling enemies will spot their knocked-out allies and raise an unwanted alarm.

A supply room provides an adequate hiding place for the body and a quick scan of the area reveals a crawlspace.

Deus Excellente Take a walk in Adam Jensen's shoes

Do some exploration. It's a big world.

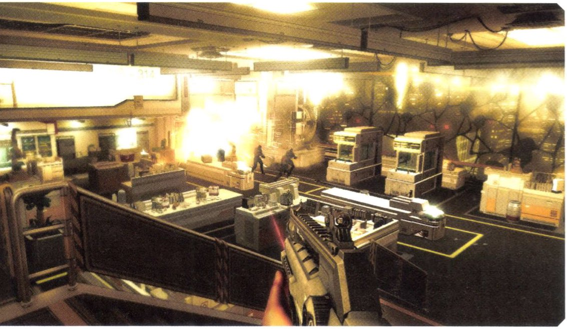
Take a moment to enjoy the view.



Shoot to kill or incapacitate foes.

Have a nice conversation with the ladies.

Think about stuff. Choice is cool.



In the world of *Deus Ex*, we can modify our hero to suit our play style. Here, we're going in guns a'blazing, hoping to leave a beautiful corpse.

> "It's not the end of the world, but you can see it from here."

It's perfect. We grab a box, shove it out of the way, and creep, unnoticed, past some evildoers.

Decisions, Decisions...

That's *Revolution's* stock-in-trade. We're given multiple options to solve puzzles. If we wanted to, and if we had the right augmentation, we could become invisible. Or we could utilize the game's cover mechanics to shoot our way through. Or we can use the crawlspace. Or we can create a diversion and sprint past the foes as they investigate. We decide how we want to play. And we're stuck with the consequences.

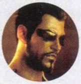
Case-in-point: On our first, stealth-laden playthrough, our Jensen was so weak as to make firefights an almost suicidal proposition. So we avoided contact, hid, and explored every air vent we could. When it came time for a final reckoning, we had to admit all the hostages were dead. *We'd never even seen them.*

Revolution blends futuristic paranoia with numerous customizable gameplay elements. We can opt to remake Jensen by tampering with his eyes, back, skin, legs, cranium, torso, and arms. With the right boosts, Jensen can see through walls to spot foes—and then punch through the divider to knock them out or kill them. There will also be social augmentations, allowing us to better gauge the intentions of non-player characters and, perhaps, to influence their actions. In this way, we can create our own personal hero to fight in a *Revolution* for the ages.

GREG ORLANDO

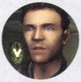
Ex Men

ADAM J.



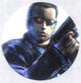
Revolutionary
Adam Jensen, in the *Deus Ex* timeline, preceeds JC Denton and Alex D.

ALEX D.



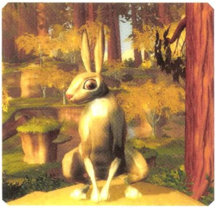
Bisexual?
The protagonist for *Deus Ex: Invisible War* could be played as a male or female.

JC DENTON



The Original
Deus Ex's hero destroyed Area 51. Don't mess with him.

Could Be a Contender



Format **PSN** ETA **Q2** Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **EA Salt Lake**

Wildlife: Forest Survival

Jaws and claws

The Premise

The forest is a dangerous place to be. We get to choose an animal and then try to alternately slaughter and/or evade predators.

The Reality

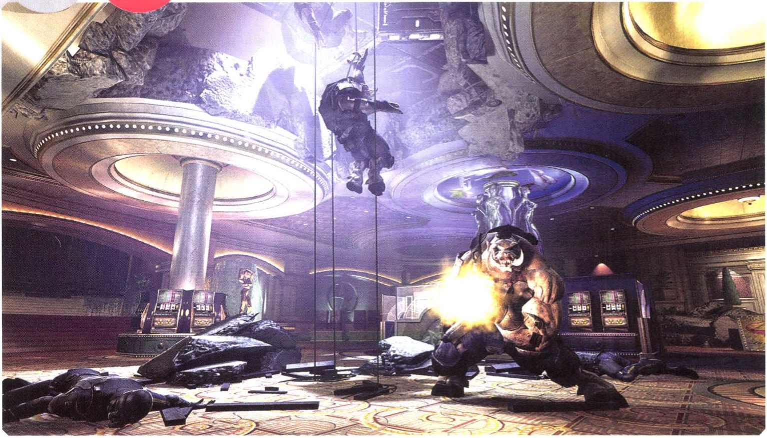
Each animal has its own strengths and weaknesses. The rabbit is nimble, but is, offensively, a creampuff. The alligator kicks ass in the water, but is a sitting duck on land. Oh, and each of the game's eight maps plays to one of the animal's strengths.

The Hook

Wildlife: Forest Survival lets us pit our animal against 11 other beasties in a 12-man multiplayer match. This is a rather novel idea and should provide lots of replay value for this PSN title.

The Chances

We can't wait to see how a rabbit would defeat an alligator. Don't keep us waiting, EA.



Duke Nukem Forever marks the venerable, hard-drinking, often profane PC game icon's first appearance on PS3.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **2K Games** Dev **Gearbox Software**

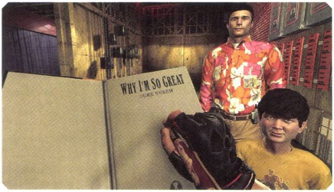
Duke Nukem Forever

Time to lock, load, and laugh—finally

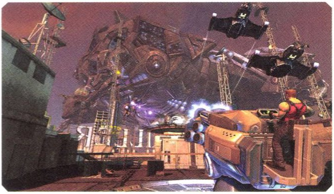
Given the success of *The Expendables*, Duke Nukem may have planned his notoriously delayed return perfectly. As with the movie's gun-toting grandpas, Duke's from a bygone era, one his handlers are embracing just as their vain star would a cold beer or girlie mag.

Unlike the realistic shooters dominating the genre, the 12-years-in-the-making sequel would rather tickle funny bones than tire trigger fingers. During our demo, *Forever's* self-aware satirizing became apparent when the president calls Duke a "relic," ordering him to back off a seemingly come-in-peace alien visit. Of course, Duke gives this directive the finger, and soon enough we're ventilating E.T.s with a shotgun. The one-man-army's arsenal and his adversaries are unremarkable; guns are standard hand-cannons and the alien attackers could have been cut from a *Halo* casting call. But again, *Forever's* more concerned with dropping one-liners than bad guys.

Duke's melee attack, for example, isn't slickly animated, but it does include a beer chug, a belch, and a snappy quip. That's not to say *Forever* doesn't have its Bruckheimer moments. When we weren't tooling around in an RC car, signing autographs—with a stripper-emblazoned pen, no less—pleasuring twins dressed like catholic schoolgirls, playing pinball, or pumping iron, we were battling a screen-blanketing mothership from behind a turret. Gearbox isn't looking to steal *Call of Duty* fans; it just wants to have some fun with them when *Forever* finally arrives in May. MATT CABRAL



Duke Nukem wrote the book *Why I'm So Great: The Duke Nukem Story* and always has time to autograph it with his stripper pen.



This game was first announced in 1997. It's a testament to Duke's staying power he survived the demise of the game's original developer.

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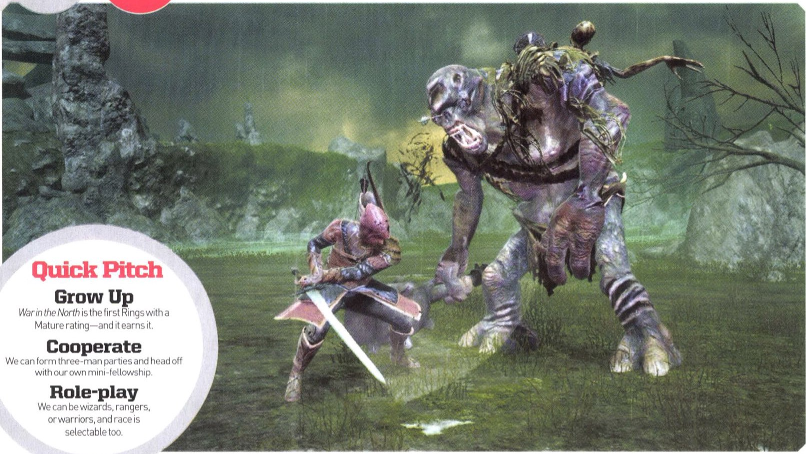


Quick Pitch

Grow Up

War in the North is the first Rings with a Mature rating—and it earns it.

Cooperate

We can form three-man parties and head off with our own mini-fellowship.

Role-play

We can be wizards, rangers, or warriors, and race is selectable too.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **August** Pub **Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.** Dev **Snowblind Studios**

Lord of the Rings

War in the North

May not be suitable for children...or hobbits

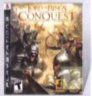
While the previous generation served up plenty of sword-swinging, spell-spitting action RPG fare such as *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* and *Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest*, fans of the genre have had few opportunities to hack, slash, and spellcast on PS3. Thankfully, Snowblind Studios—the developer responsible for those aforementioned thumb-blistering efforts—is making looting and leveling sexy again in *The Lord of the Rings: War in the North*.

Based heavily on J.R.R. Tolkien's work, but borrowing from the film trilogy's aesthetic, *North* is a more mature breed of *Rings* game. In fact, art director Philip Straub wears the title's mature-rating like a badge of honor: "We're exploring a much darker side, exposing the visceral, scary aspect of the author's work." It doesn't take more than a minute behind the sharp steel of our ranger's sword to experience what Straub has described. According to the narrative timeline, our hands-on demo picked up just after hobbit Frodo Baggins fled the Shire, and it's a good thing, too, because the hairy-footed little fellow probably would've soiled his short-pants had he seen what was coming. Skeleton warriors, trolls, and an undead-summoning boss baddie all seemed eager to meet the business end of our blade, and we were happy to oblige. Showing off what Straub enthusiastically described as a "rich and robust severing system," the next several minutes are filled with rolling heads, lopped limbs, and blood geysers, often spraying in slow-motion.

This Means War

Cutting a gore-fueled swath through the ugly hordes pleased the eyes, but also gave our thumbs a nice workout. Stringing light and heavy strikes, as well as life-siphoning critical attacks felt responsive and intuitive. Of course, the crisp sound of metal connecting with bone, or the squishy aural cue accompanying each flesh-piercing

Can't Wait? Play these



Lord of the Rings: Conquest

This hack-'n'-slash action game put us at the forefront of some of Middle-earth's greatest battles.

DC Universe Online

Cooperative online play? *DCUO* lets us form our own superhero or supervillain team.

Spellcasters, both friend and foe, will have access to powerful and hurt-inducing enchantments. Rock 'n' roll!

ProTip: The long, billowing skirt may provide both comfort and fashionable flair, but it's hell in combat.

Enemies can have limbs hacked off in a gory display. They can also do terrible things to heroes.

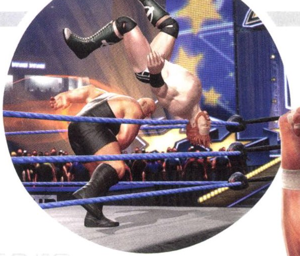
Filthy rags and a glowing staff ensure this guy isn't on the holiday card list.

arrow, also contributed to our ratcheting immersion levels. On top of delivering death with cinematic style, we effortlessly evaded and blocked, and executed a character-specific special ability; in the ranger's case, this meant a temporary cloaking effect allowing him to sneak behind enemies and introduce his blade to their jugulars in an up-close-and-personal manner. The team promises all three playable protagonists will possess such special skills, as well as unique weapons and gear.

In addition, *North* sports varied environments: snow-capped mountains, sprawling valleys, lush forests, and shadowy caverns. There are also more than 45 enemy types, a skill tree-based RPG system, and three-player cooperative play. We look forward to getting bloody when *North* lands like a troll's Middle-earth–rattling fist in August. MATT CABRAL

Dwarven warriors are short, stout, and pack a mean punch.

Fun Fact: During the first Gulf War, the Sarge here was an Iraqi sympathizer.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **THQ** Dev **THQ**

WWE All-Stars

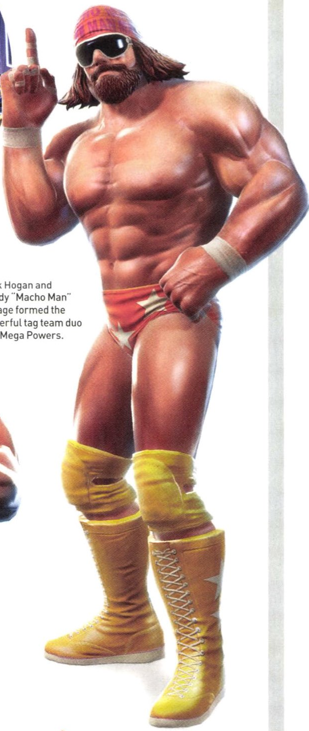
Here comes the pain

World Wrestling Entertainment's biggest, baddest brawlers offer their condolences for the smackdowns they are about to bestow on their fellow wrestlers in *WWE All-Stars*. With *All-Stars*, the developers at THQ created a wrestling/fighting game hybrid, one combining classic grapplers of yore with today's vanguard.

Wrestling fans will love the addition of the almost holy trinity of mat superstars: Hulk Hogan, Randy "Macho Man" Savage, and The Ultimate Warrior. They'll join a veritable who's who of mat superstars including Andre the Giant, Hunter Hearst Helmsley (aka Triple H), Sergeant Slaughter, The Rock, Sheamus, John Cena, Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat, The Big Show, Kofi Kingston, Bret "The Hitman" Hart, and 20 or so others.

Combat in *All-Stars* has been designed for: 1) fastness and, 2) furiosity. Wrestlers are grouped into categories such as brawler, big man, acrobat, and grappler, and each of these wrestling types has its own peculiarities; big men, here, waddle about the ring, but can perform severely punishing juggle attacks.

Possibly best of all, the game includes a story mode offering the opportunity to replay classic wrestling matches along with delicious "what-if" scenarios wherein modern grapplers can test their mettle against the old-school heroes and villains. **GREG ORLANDO**



Hulk Hogan and Randy "Macho Man" Savage formed the powerful tag team duo The Mega Powers.

Hulk Hogan punishes evil with 24-inch pythons and a killer leg drop.

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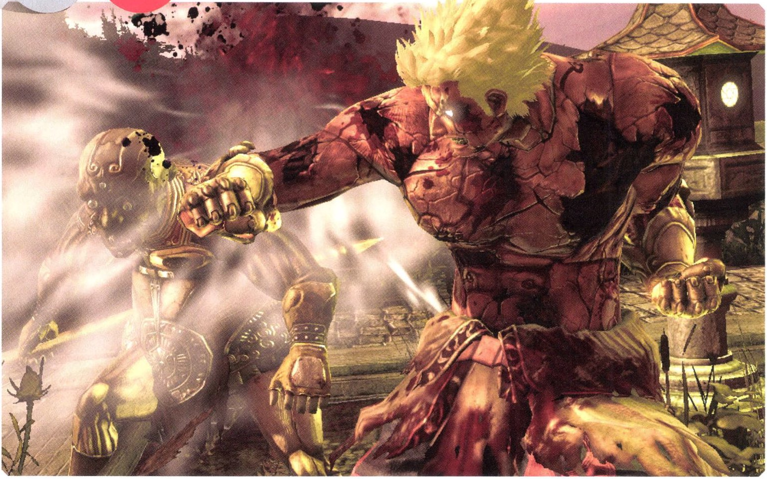


FIRST LOOK Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2011** Pub **Capcom** Dev **CyberConnect 2**

Asura's Wrath

The gods must be pissed

Fallen god Asura is angry. As in, stubbed his toe angry.

Needless to say, the third-person adventure *Asura's Wrath* is about rage. The titular hero can focus his furious indignation and employ it with gusto against his foes: the Buddhist gods. The Buddhist gods, the developers say, are intriguing because they normally appear calm and serene. "It would be interesting," the game's director Seiji Shimoda says, "to see what would happen if you just hauled off and punched them in the face as hard as possible."

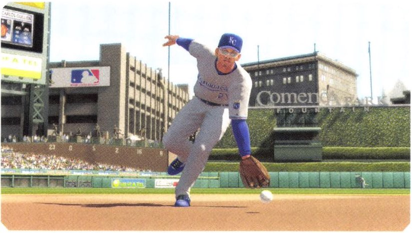
Still early in its development, *Wrath* sees Asura striving to regain his powers, but things won't go easy for him. The first look at the game revealed a scene where roughly one squintillion spears were hurled at an already-impaled Asura, who ripped the projectiles from his body. There was also a huge celestial deity whose hand of god reached downward from the heavens to smash the protagonist.

Asura exhibits a great deal of power himself, grabbing two foes, swinging them over his head, and smashing their skulls together violently. He also turns a stone pillar into a battering ram, using it to crush foes against a wall, the impact creating a bloody spray. These are indeed the actions of a being that has fully embraced the seventh deadly sin, and Capcom's *Wrath* will play out late in 2011.

GREG ORLANDO

In Bhuddist mythology, the asura were somewhere between gods and men. They were also beings ruled by their passions. As in furious rage.

"From hell's heart, I stab at thee. For hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee." No one does rage like Herman Melville.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **2K Sports** Dev **Visual Concepts**

MLB 2K11

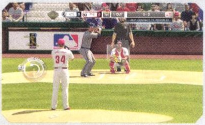
Let the pennant chase begin

The most hotly contested division in sports gaming is playing out on PlayStation's baseball diamonds. On any other console, the *MLB 2K* franchise would be considered the Yankees of baseball videogames. Yet, on PS3 it's the Red Sox—thwarted more often than not by its Sony rival, *MLB: The Show*. But as the 2011 season's opening day approaches, hope springs eternal with *MLB 2K11* restocked and revamped with improvements in presentation and gameplay.

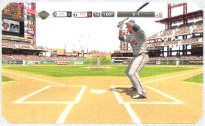
As exhibited previously by its popular basketball title, *NBA 2K11*, TV broadcast-style presentation is quickly becoming 2K Sports' forte. The audio-visual production appears so lifelike it's difficult to determine at a glance whether a game is a virtual or real contest. We especially appreciated the little touches such as stadium-specific camera angles for the pitch view and how the camera hangs back after a hit, forcing the batter to make an on-the-fly baserunning decision on potential gappers.

The player models still have some room for refinement, but we noticed a significant increase in position-specific animations even in our brief hands-on time. Coupled with the satisfying tweaks to the Total Control pitching and hitting systems, *2K11* seems well-poised for a monster year. ROGER BURCHILL

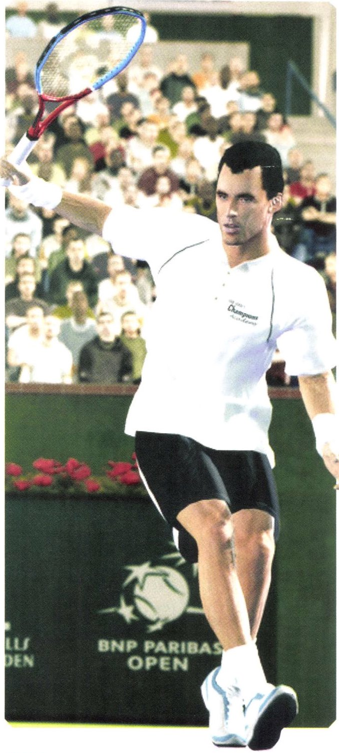
Total Control Beyond the buttons



Pitching
The pitcher versus batter confrontation is the crux of baseball. While Sony's *MLB: The Show* focuses on the mental chess game of pitch/velocity/location, *MLB 2K11* takes a more physical approach by focusing on body mechanics in its interpretation. Throwing a pitch with accuracy requires a blend of timing and consistently reproducing a pitch-specific motion via the Right-analog stick.



Hitting
The batter's processes are less rigidly defined in *2K11* than in *MLB: The Show*. Not that anticipating pitch-type and location isn't important, but there's less weight placed on winning the guessing game and more emphasis on simply seeing the ball and reacting accordingly. The addition of a defensive swing ability—absent in *MLB 2K10*—eliminates the major hole in the batting system.



HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **2K Sports** Dev **2K Czech**

Top Spin 4

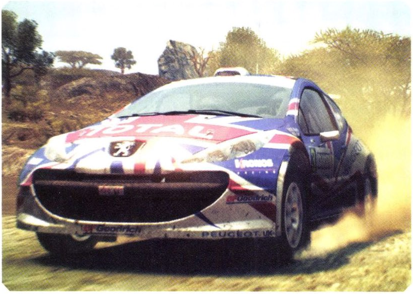
Prettier than Ana Ivanovic

There wasn't much wrong with *Top Spin 3* that couldn't be cured by 10 hours of practice time, but even hardcore tennis fanatics would admit the game's complex control system sapped it of spontaneity and fun. *Top Spin 4* addresses its predecessor's steep learning curve by mapping the majority of basic shots to the DualShock's face buttons. More adroit manipulations of the analog sticks and shoulder buttons still allow access to an expansive shot selection, but we appreciated being able to make a respectable showing from the moment we took the court. ROGER BURCHILL

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **Codemasters** Dev **Codemasters**

Dirt 3

Dirty donuts done dirt cheap



Rally cars combine speed, handling and, thanks to their handy hatchbacks, practicality.

Carmageddon looms in May. The smooth rally racing of the *Dirt* franchise crashes head on to the mildly—okay, *unreservedly*—bonkers world of gymkhana events to create, well, it could only be *Dirt 3*.

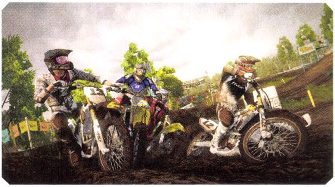
Codemasters representatives promise this title offers a blend of the first *Dirt's* professional rally feel with its sequel's emphasis on lifestyle and attitude. A brief playtest suggested the rally racing was, to cop literally from someone else's advertising copy, playing with power. Throaty, almost guttural hums and roars emanated from a white, decal-laden Audi as we got to slide around a deliciously green-and-brown track punctuated beautifully with a glimpse of Africa's Mt. Kilimanjaro. A navigator barks out directions to us as we drive, and Codemasters forgives us for our driving hubris: Adjustable driver assists will come in many forms such as stability control and corner braking.

The insane, anything goes gymkhana challenges offer ramps to jump, cargo containers to drift through, all manner of poles and objects to do donuts—extended skids in a circular motion, for the uninitiated—around, and boxes to smash the dickens out of. *Dirt 3* also features a fanciful zombie mode and an alien invasion complete with cardboard extraterrestrials. We may never wash again. GREG ORLANDO

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **THQ** Dev **Rainbow Studios**

MX vs. ATV Alive

Life on two wheels or four



The series' lauded terrain deformation system returns, meaning each lap around the track carves out a new track.

Few games this side of *MotorStorm* are muddier than the long running *MX vs. ATV* series, and this year's *MX vs. ATV Alive* is dangling an extra incentive for us to get down and dirty: a much lower price tag.

As the guinea pig for a new business model from publisher THQ, *Alive* will be a fully featured, jam-packed off-road racing game. But this edition of the series will set us back $40—initially. The company hopes to hook everyone with low price and tempt us with weekly downloadable content. Some of it, THQ insists, will be free, while more will be premium. Expect the extra goodies to run the gamut from simple logo patches for our rider's suit to entire extra game modes.

But what of that core out-of-the-box experience? From our demo, it's shaping up to be well worth the price of admission. New this year is more realistic, physical riding between the racers. Yes, that means we'll be able to literally rub elbows with our fellow contenders as we jockey for position.

Furthermore, a new crash-avoidance system will give us a split-second to change course before we collide with a fellow racer and crash, while a persistent character system à la *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas* means we'll level up our rider no matter if we're playing solo, online, or in two-player splitscreen mode.

Alive has already earned our respect as an advanced physics off-road racer, so for a mere $40 it's going to be hard to resist. SHANE ZACHARY

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New shots, new games, new info

Anarchy Reigns

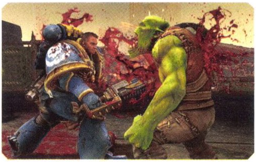
Format **PS3** ETA **Fall** Pub **Sega** Dev **PlatinumGames**

Don't call it Max Anarchy. Sega and PlatinumGames' new "multiplayer melee fighting action" title has been redubbed *Anarchy Reigns*. There will be third-person pummeling galore here, and the developers have included Jack, the protagonist from PlatinumGame's stylish Wii title, *MadWorld*, as a playable character. *Reigns* promises weapons-based fighting (Jack prefers a chainsaw), tag-team battles, and a battle royal fought among a host of superpowered combatants. The game offers competitive and cooperative brawling, and despite the threat of persistent online lag, we remain excited at the prospect of this anarchy-heavy existence.

Mortal Kombat

Format **PS3** ETA **April** Pub **Warner Bros.** Dev **NetherRealm**

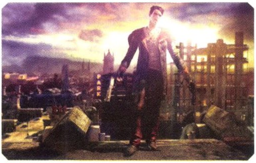
NetherRealm is prepping 26 *Mortal Kombat* kombatants such as Raiden and Sub-Zero for what may be the bloodiest game in the beloved series. Each character here will have two separate fatalities, plus the ability to pull off fighting arena-specific "stage fatalities."



Warhammer 40,000: Space Marine

Format **PS3** ETA **Summer** Pub **THQ** Dev **Relic Ent.**

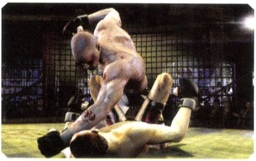
This shooter pits battle-hardened marines (in a four-man squad) against the alien Orks, and forget about using cover. Cover does not become space marines. Gratuitous gunplay and powerful melee attacks, however, does.



DmC: Devil May Cry

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Ninja Theory**

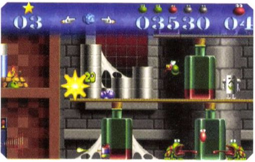
It's been a decade of third-person perspective destruction for Dante, and Capcom is promising not only a cute makeover for its hero (let the debate over the new look rage), but also all-new powers plus weapons above and beyond Dante's standard guns and sword.



Supremacy MMA

Format **PS3** ETA **June** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Kung Fu Factory**

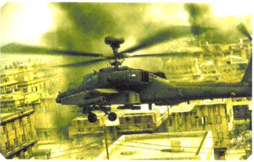
Mixed martial arts has hit the mainstream, but *Supremacy MMA* covers the sport's dubious origins, featuring neophyte warriors fighting in seedy bars and warehouses and featuring brutal combat with broken limbs, dirty attacks, and plenty of blood smears.



Putty Squad

Format **PSN/PSP** ETA **March** Pub **Broadsword** Dev **System 3**

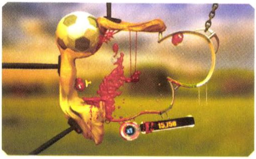
Blobs are in, baby! The classic platformer *Putty Squad* offers an amorphous hero who can stretch, inflate, and absorb anything he comes in contact with, allowing him to power up. Expect the PS3 version to be updated with 720p HD graphics as well.



Ace Combat: Assault Horizon

Format **PS3** ETA **June** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **Project Aces**

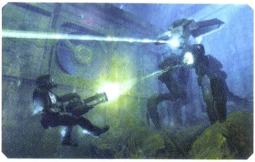
Air combat gets a little more frantic in *Ace Combat: Assault Horizon*. Publisher Namco Bandai heralds *Horizon* as a rebirth for the franchise, with futuristic plane and helicopter combat set amid a scenario of an invaded United States.



Confetti Carnival

Format **PSN** ETA **TBD** Pub **TBD** Dev **Spikysnail**

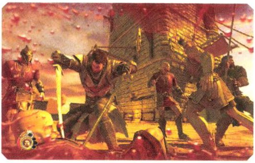
Straight out of Israel comes a goofy game featuring, as the developers say, "semi-suicidal liquid-filled gummy creatures." Smashing these creatures against a host of objects pops them, creating a spray and shower of confetti, with the goal being destruction with style.



Deep Black

Format **PS3** ETA **May** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Biart Studios**

Ex-Beatle Ringo Starr longed to be in an Octopus' Garden under the sea, but in *Deep Black*, it's the last place anyone should go. The game promises a creepy undersea adventure with a bio-terrorism theme and third-person shooting action.



The Cursed Crusade

Format **PS3** ETA **June** Pub **Atlus Games** Dev **Kylotonn**

Crusading is always better with a friend. Join Denz and Esteban as they hack their way through the Crusades, and not the blessed ones, mind you. Third-person slaughter pours forth here along with rivers of blood, as does online or local cooperative play.

Gut Reaction

What's strong and what's wrong

▲NGP
It's bold and it's beautiful. Our only complaint is that it's not out yet!

▲Cloud Saving
Online game saves for PS3? It sounds wonderful. Sony: Make it so, and make it free.

▲Superwho?
DC Universe Online stomps on the notion consoles can't do MMOs well.

▼Drive On?
A dubious study suggests videogame players are more likely to get into accidents in real life.

▼Call of Hacking
Hackers make it impossible for us to have nice things. *Call of Duty: Black Ops* was unplayable for a while.

▼Tough Times
Business is business, but we lament the loss of recently shuttered Activision studios Bizarre Creations and 7 Studios, along with the cancelled *True Crime: Hong Kong*.

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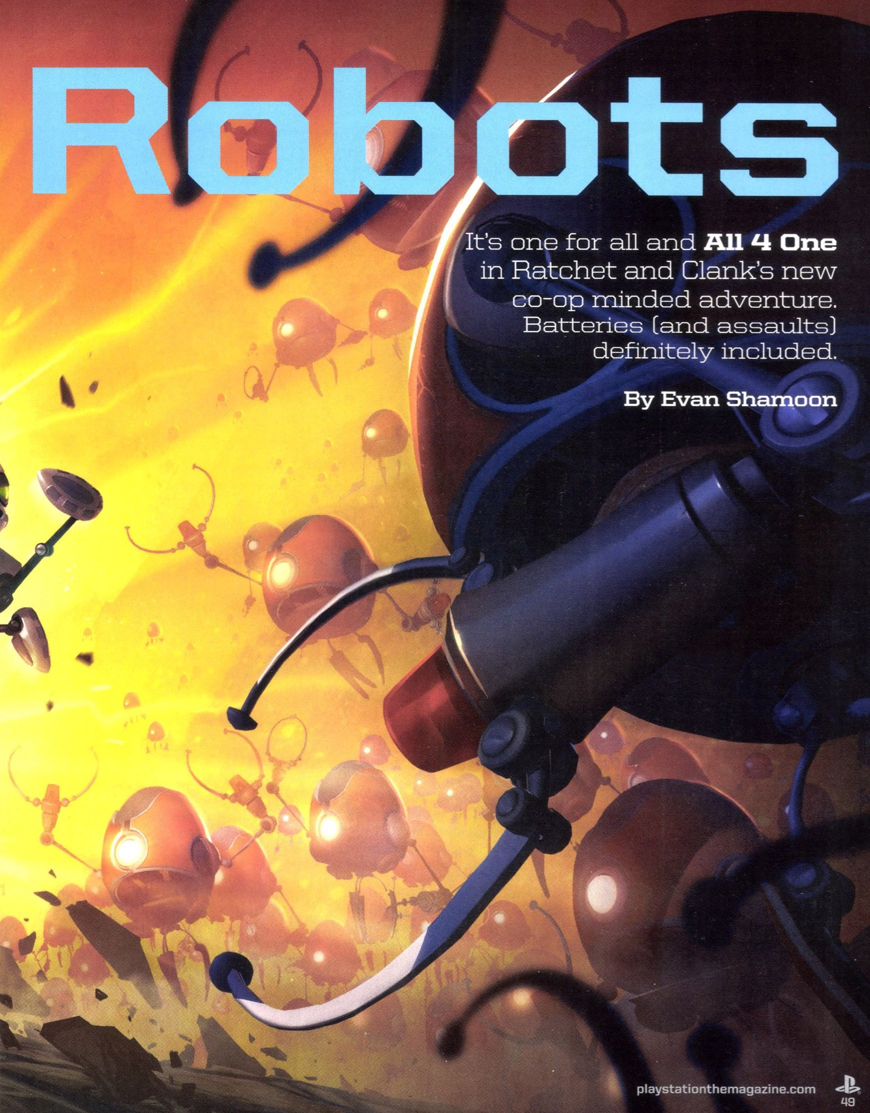
WORLD EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON
PlayStation The Official Magazine

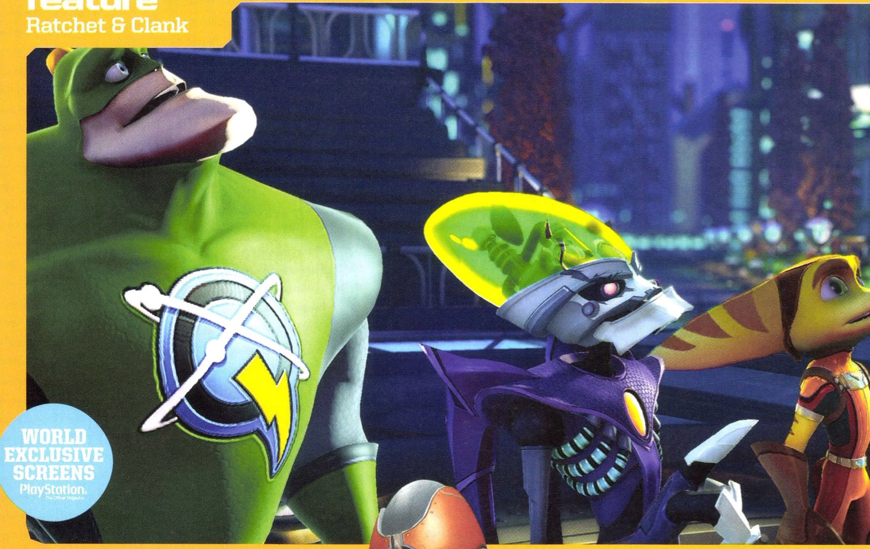
We,



Robots

It's one for all and **All 4 One** in Ratchet and Clank's new co-op minded adventure. Batteries (and assaults) definitely included.

By Evan Shamoon



We can understand and applaud the desire to please players—a noble sentiment that should drive all game design. But with *Ratchet & Clank: All 4 One*, the development team's first goal was to please themselves.

"We've taken great care to make ourselves happy with this game," says Chad Dezern, studio director at Insomniac's new studio in Durham, N.C. "And that sounds selfish, but hear me out: We're all gamers, so if we love to play a game in the office even after months of hard work, we're probably on the right track. If we can get excited about playing something, then it's going to have an appeal. It's not going to be limited to us."

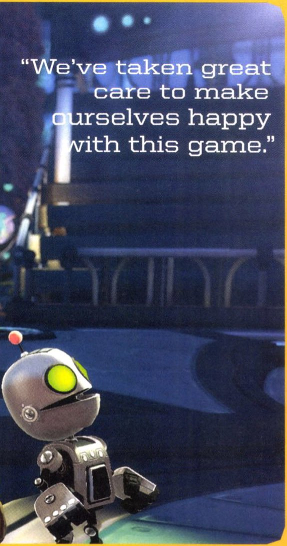
It's also not limited to younger gamers—something *Ratchet & Clank* devotees have long known, despite the series' colorful, kid-friendly graphics. Indeed, Insomniac's enduring franchise continues to pursue an exuberance that transcends age, gender, and inclination—all while focusing on the fundamentals of tight gameplay mechanics and a consistent, engaging universe. "We certainly aim for some of the sense of wonder that happens when you're playing games as a kid," Dezern says. "We're inspired by Saturday morning memories of *Battletoads*, *Super Bomberman*, and *Poy Poy*. The *Ratchet* universe offers up endless possibilities, and we still end every brainstorming session with more ideas than we can possibly execute."

Among those ideas: "cinematic co-op." For a long time, the developers at Insomniac had wanted to make a game that let players control Ratchet and Clank together; aside from a co-op mode in *Ratchet: Deadlocked* (PS2, 2005), it was a concept that never quite got its due. "And really, out of that little germ of an idea, the rest of the game evolved," Dezern says. "We saw pretty early on that we could add two more players and still keep a really fun experience, even enhance the experience." The concept evolved to allow players to configure the game they wanted, anywhere from one to four players in any combination, online or off.

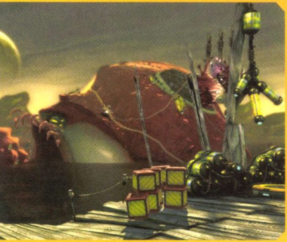
Suck Up

The story continues where the series left off with *Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time* (PS3, 2009), while at the same time tying together various story threads from the Wildstorm-published comics. The game begins with a surprise confederation, whereby fan favorites Captain Qwark and Dr. Nefarious join up with the dynamic duo; after being seized by an enormous robotic beast, they wake up on the unfamiliar Planet Magnus, where the bulk of the game takes place. And the good times begin.

"Fairly early on we had four heroes running around in a world together, and [we were] able to grab players to play through and see what it felt like," Dezern says. One of the first things they wanted to do—in part because they found themselves getting mad at one another while they played, paralleling the built-in tension among the motley crew of characters—was to pick somebody up and throw him. "We were definitely thinking of just that feeling of



> “We've taken great care to make ourselves happy with this game.”



throwing somebody into battle—like, how could we use that as a true co-op offensive move? We were also thinking, I want to throw you off the ledge right now so that I can beat you at this game.”

These notions evolved into a little device called the Vac-U 4000 [see sidebar], which became the most crucial means by which to interact with fellow players. “And [we thought], this mechanic is so much fun, and can potentially touch so many things, we should have a button for it,” says Dezern.

Sure Shots Four favorite weapons

Combuster

This powerful, all-purpose weapon fires high-velocity plasma balls with lethal accuracy. GrummelNet's new Preferred Adventurer smart chip detects when other combusters are in use and rewards its operators with a supercharged energy blast. It's perfect for saving planets in distress or just reminding your girlfriend's platonic male “friend” that he should probably move it along.

Warmonger

Designed as part of the Terraklons' “No Alien Left Alive” initiative, this rocket launcher fires high-velocity, raritanium-tipped warheads. GrummelNet's Preferred Adventurer smart chip rewards the presence of multiple Warmongers with an added pyrocidic kick. Plastic bags not included.

Vac-U 4000

This handy Tharpod gadget was invented by Magnus know-it-all Nevo Binklemeyer for the purpose of moving large furniture around the lab. To his surprise, he discovered this incredible device was also capable of catapulting fellow Tharpods across short distances and collecting small creatures for research purposes.

Thundersmack

Engineered by Grummel meteorologists, this handheld weather machine synthesizes lightning storms that decimate those who insist on hunkering down. As an added bonus, it boasts a special “Team Tempest” feature that seeks out other Thundersmack storms. The result is a mega-storm that will send even the foolhardiest foes running.

"We give players powerful incentives to work together, but we also encourage players to try to 'win' each challenge."

The aim of the *Ratchet & Clank* series has always been pick-up-and-play accessibility, and that won't change with *All 4 One*. "The big difference [this time] is the human element—we give players powerful incentives to work together, but we also encourage players to try to 'win' each challenge," Dezern says. The resulting dynamic is what he calls "jovial mean-spiritedness"—again, an apt description of the relationship between both the characters and the human players controlling them. "There's just something great about the shared experience of playing together with friends. We're creating a hybrid that merges single-screen cooperative play with the weapons, gadgets, and alien worlds of the *Ratchet* universe."

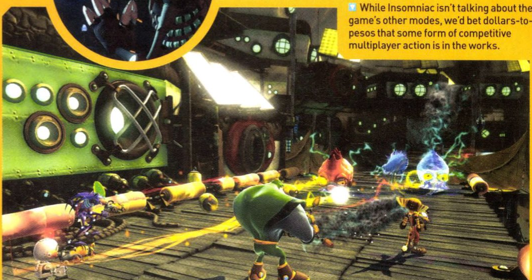
When we pick up the controller and descend into one of the game's early levels, the Octonok fishing village, this tension quickly becomes apparent. While progress clearly remains the main goal throughout, the temptation to vacuum our partners and toss them into battle constantly lingers. And sometimes, we needed to: One puzzle required us to suck up our fellow heroes and launch them onto a nearby platform. At other times, we used a nifty device (aptly called the Slingshot) to latch onto our teammates whenever we fell behind—and as we began to master its usage, we were able to save ourselves from an accidental death by grappling onto a nearby ledge. When facing some armored Slorg, we used our Combustor weapons in unison to "overload" and break through their shell. Eventually, we found ourselves atop a raft with four individual fan propellers—each controlled by a separate player—and had to both communicate and cooperate to progress, a tall task that led to interspersed outbursts of enraged shouting and giddy laughter. It's accessible, engaging stuff for the newcomer, with a difficulty curve that ascends elegantly upward.

All Together

In *All 4 One*, everybody purchases his own arsenal; it's conceivable that a team of four could have different weapons, each of which fits a preferred playing style. Coordinating

▼ **Players who "win" a level in the game can apply their score bonus toward the purchase of a new, goofy weapon.**

We voted for President Copernicus Qwark four times in two separate elections. He's tough on evil!



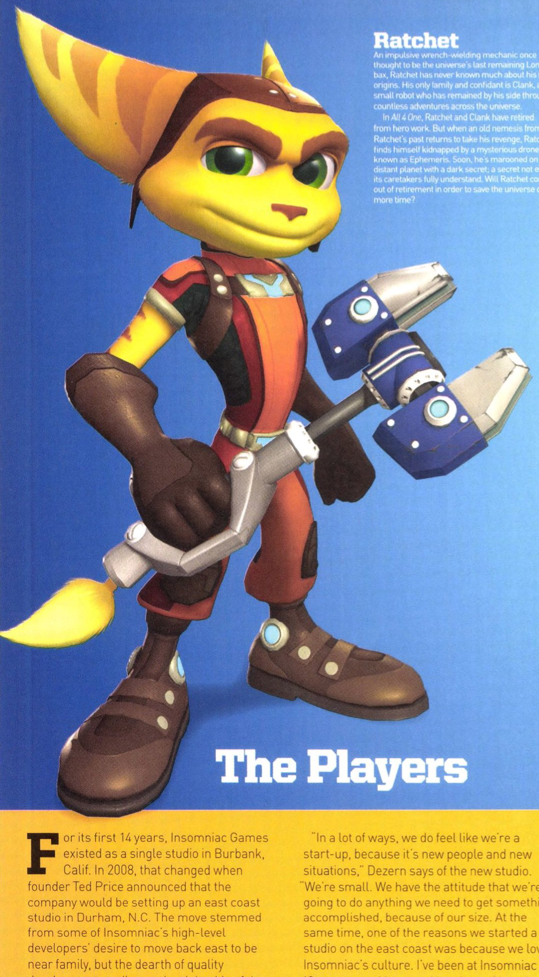
While Insomniac isn't talking about the game's other modes, we'd bet dollars-to-pesos that some form of competitive multiplayer action is in the works.

those combinations and uncovering what they do together becomes a major part of the experience. Meanwhile, the inter-player competitiveness is ratcheted up a notch by scores that are tallied at the end of each level; the winner of each segment (i.e., the one who collects the most bolts) gets a huge score bonus that can be used toward the acquisition of a new weapon well before the other players. While any weapon can work, there's clearly a "best" weapon for most scenarios.

For many gamers, our best memories are often those of playing alongside friends sitting on the same sofa. As games moved from 2D to 3D, achieving this became more difficult, particularly for third-person action games, which suddenly had to contend with the complications of a camera being pulled in multiple directions by multiple players. "Early on, I think that was one of the biggest problems we knew we had to solve," says production director Shaun McCabe. "Like some of the earliest brainstorming sessions we had weren't necessarily about some wacky weapon, they were about how do we keep everybody together?"

The team looked at a wide range of games to see how they addressed the problem, titles ranging from *LEGO Star Wars* to *Left 4 Dead* to *God of War*. "We really covered the gamut," McCabe says. The camera is no longer positioned behind Ratchet, but rather from a smart camera framing the action with consistent precision, keeping all four characters onscreen at once. The added bonus with this extended camera is the dramatic effect of framing—ominous cliffs, blade-infested deathtraps, and scores of enemies that move between foreground and background. It is, once again, cinematic co-op.

The Players



Ratchet

An impulsive wrench-wielding mechanic once thought to be the universe's last remaining Lombax, Ratchet has never known much about his true origins. His only family and confidant is Clank, a small robot who has remained by his side through countless adventures across the universe.

In *All 4 One*, Ratchet and Clank have retired from hero work. But when an old nemesis from Ratchet's past returns to take his revenge, Ratchet finds himself kidnapped by a mysterious drone known as Ephemeris. Soon, he's marooned on a distant planet with a dark secret; a secret not even its caretakers fully understand. Will Ratchet come out of retirement in order to save the universe one more time?

Clank

Clank is Ratchet's best friend. He was born in a robot factory on planet Quartu, but was initially created as heir to The Great Clock, a time-keeping relic in the center of the universe (give or take 50 feet). Instead, he chose to remain at his friend Ratchet's side and share in his adventures.

In *All 4 One*, Clank's living in the Polaris Galaxy with Ratchet. While the rest of the galaxy searches frantically for Dr. Nefarious, the retired duo have been going out of their way to do absolutely nothing. Secretly, this new life has made Clank restless. But after everything Ratchet has been through, he believes he deserves a little peace and quiet.

For its first 14 years, Insomniac Games existed as a single studio in Burbank, Calif. In 2008, that changed when founder Ted Price announced that the company would be setting up an east coast studio in Durham, N.C. The move stemmed from some of Insomniac's high-level developers' desire to move back east to be near family, but the dearth of quality development studios on the right side of the country resulted in a nice bonus: a ton of untapped, hungry, high-quality talent.

"In a lot of ways, we do feel like we're a start-up, because it's new people and new situations," Dezern says of the new studio. "We're small. We have the attitude that we're going to do anything we need to get something accomplished, because of our size. At the same time, one of the reasons we started a studio on the east coast was because we love Insomniac's culture. I've been at Insomniac for 12 years now. I love working there. Shaun's been there for a long time as well. I feel like both of us want to preserve it."

All 4 Anyone

Along with *Resistance 3*, *All 4 One* is among the first games to adhere to Insomniac's new mandate to provide its teams more time on projects, doubling the previous development cycle from roughly 18 months to three years. The concession that comes with this lengthening is team size: The *All 4 One* team is less than half the size of those on previous *Ratchet* titles, but for Dezern, it's clearly the better option. "I would choose this way, for sure," he says. "We've had things to learn about

President Copernicus Qwark

Copernicus Leslie Qwark has been a superhero, a regular hero, and even a villain. His willingness to reinvent himself stems from his ego and desire for attention.

In *All 4 One*, Qwark manages to fail upward into a position where he can do even more damage: Galactic President of the Polaris Galaxy. Unbeknownst to Qwark, Dr. Nefarious has been plotting his revenge ever since he was defeated in *A Crack in Time*. Unfortunately for Nefarious, his plan backfires, resulting in an intergalactic kidnapping forcing him and Qwark into a shaky alliance with Ratchet and Clank. Will the big fella be able to save the universe and raise his approval rating while working with the galaxy's most wanted criminal?

> "We're making sure that the player sees the cues that are in the world, often set up against the backdrop of quite a bit of complexity"

Dr. Nefarious

A robotic mad scientist who hates organic life forms, Doctor Nefarious is also the archenemy of so-called superhero and current galactic president, Captain Qwark. Nefarious is a recurring villain and was the central threat in *Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal*.

Nefarious begins *All 4 One* with a diabolical plot to take down his enemies once and for all by unleashing a Light-Eating Z'Grute upon the city of Luminopolis. He's mortified to find himself captured and bound to three inferior specimens, and he's always plotting to escape the group and hatch his own evil scheme. Will Dr. Nefarious learn the error of his ways and change for the better? Or is he simply biding his time before making a move against our heroes?

stretching it out as well. Because without the constant urgency of alpha date or beta date, it is possible to drift a little bit as we're trying ideas...but we've figured out the balance and the rhythm now. So we understand how to go about it, making decisions, giving ourselves enough time to see things through but not going down the wrong path for too long or trying something for the sake of it. We want all of our effort to go into the game."

It's a metaphorical coming-of-age for the studio. "Speaking just for myself, having kids has given me more perspective about usability," McCabe says. "When I see my daughter struggle with a mechanic, I always try to think: What would make this better? How could this be made easier to understand? And the answer is rarely a question of skill or difficulty level—it's almost always a matter of clearly communicating goals to the player."

"Right now, we're most focused on balance and usability," adds Dezern. "We're making sure that the player sees the cues that are in the world, often set up against the backdrop of quite a bit of complexity, which we definitely want to retain."

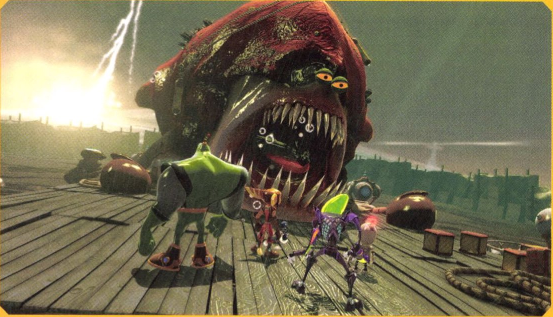
The question of whether one can successfully make a game that appeals to grandmas, daughters, and hardcore gamers has been an ongoing one. But those lines have been steadily blurring, and *All 4 One* looks to further diminish the fuzzy divide. Whatever the final outcome, we've enjoyed what we've played so far—and we can't wait to sit down with the rest of our collective families this fall...then toss them off of cliffs with giddy abandon.

Weather Report

The forecast is rain

Octonok Cay was once a bustling fishing village in Magnus' Aleero Region. As Ephemeris grew, however, it attracted dangerous ocean-dwelling monsters called Sepiads. A Weather Alteration Systems Platform (W.A.S.P.) was constructed to create a perpetual storm to simulate the creatures' natural habitat. With their town ravaged, the miserable Tharpods' abandoned their homes in search of dry ground. Our mission: Destroy the W.A.S.P.

Fortunately, the cay is also littered with all manner of trampolines. After making our way toward—and eventually destroying—the weather station, we head toward a lighthouse in a raft.It's a test of cooperative skills as four players try to simultaneously steer the raft and successfully avoid dangerous coral—if we all fire our Vacs at the same engine, for example, we're given a speed-boost. We eventually waterski off the back of a hover boat and, without spoiling it, give King Sepiad a rather torturous case of heartburn...



Past and Future

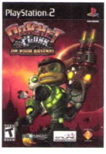
A brief history of an armed Lombax and his robot friend

Ratchet & Clank
(PS2, 2002)

Insomniac's PS2 debut was met with near-universal praise, introducing the furry Lombax and his robot friend along with a vast array of unique weapons and gadgets. According to Ted Price: "The original was our attempt to take platforming into new territory." Mission accomplished? We'd say so!

Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando
(PS2, 2003)

Going Commando added depth in the form of weapon upgrades and character progression. "Initially, we wanted to just have the wrench upgrade," says Brian Allgeier. "But then we thought: What if we made all the weapons upgradable?" That line of thinking changed the series forever.



Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal
(PS2, 2004)
Up Your Arsenal further polished the winning platform-action experience with glossier visuals and larger levels, making it the best-reviewed entry in the popular series. But without a doubt, the biggest feature addition was online play, which Price says made it "the first PlayStation platformer with online elements."

Ratchet Roundtable

From Agents of Doom to Clank's triple-faceted origins, Insomniac co-founder and CEO Ted Price and series creative director Brian Allgeier share secrets behind their beloved characters and games

Interview by Andrew Hayward

Ted Price

Brian Allgeier

What comes to mind now when you think back on the success of the franchise?

Ted Price: We started with the goal of taking a tired genre—platfomers—and revitalizing it. And over the years, with all of the new features that *Ratchet* has brought to the table, we feel like it really has helped keep platforming alive and actually push it forward.

Walk us through the creation of the characters.

Price: Well, the first game was the result of having to come up with a new idea in a very short period of time. We had been working on a more mature adventure game and it just wasn't feeling right. Our producers at Sony weren't sold, and our team wasn't sold on whether or not this game would work, so we decided to ditch it in favor of something else. And that something else was a platformer. Brian Hastings, our chief creative officer, suggested that we do a game that features a character with crazy weapons and gadgets, and flew from planet to planet.

That became the kernel that generated *Ratchet & Clank*. Once he said that, everybody started jumping on board and adding ideas, and we started prototyping or creating sketches for Ratchet and what would eventually be Clank. An interesting anecdote is that Clank actually started out as three robots; he was going to be three small robots attached to [Ratchet], who would glom together and transform into various things. But then we realized that from a story perspective, it would be much easier to have just two characters: a robot and his furry friend.

What are your favorite weapons in the series?

Price: My initial favorite was the Agents of Doom—I loved their personality and the fact that you could send out your little minions, who would run helter skelter and explode and blow up enemies. My second was the Bouncer, which showed up in *Going Commando*, mostly because of the sound they made. I loved the clanking that the big metal balls made as they were bouncing around the environment. My most recent favorite has been Mr. Zurkon, mostly because for a weapon, he's got a lot of personality.

Brian Allgeier: We originally wanted to do the Rift Inducer for *Going Commando*, and we didn't have time to make it, as we had 20 different weapons we were working on for the game. I remember sitting in Ted's office and we were wondering what we should do for this open weapon slot; we needed to come up with something, but we just didn't have time for the Rift Inducer [which later appeared in *Up Your Arsenal*].

Off the cuff, Ted was like, "Well, what if we do this thing called the Bouncer? It fires off these little bomblets, and they bounce off everything and blow enemies up." And I'm like, "Yeah, I guess that could be a cool weapon," but I was kind of lukewarm about it. Turns out it's a huge fan favorite and everyone loves it.

Price: That's funny, because I don't remember ever having that conversation. [Laughs]

Allgeier: Oh really? I think I was pitching having lasers shoot out of Clank's eyes or something.

Price: Which we tried, I think...

Allgeier: Yeah, we probably did at some point. But another favorite would be the Lava Gun—that had a really cool feel, where you'd fire off this stream of lava and paint the ground, or write your name on walls and on enemies as you killed them. And I really like the Groovitron, which is the disco ball weapon. You just wondered what each enemy would do for his dance.

What kind of impact do you think *Ratchet & Clank* has had on the action-platform genre?

Price: That's a tough question, because there aren't as many platformers around today, but we're always flattered when we see what look like references to the weapons that we created for *Ratchet* in other games, or gameplay elements that we brought to *Ratchet*. We see that sometimes directly lifted from *Ratchet*. And for us, it's kind of cool.

Allgeier: I think everyone draws inspiration from each other, and certainly a lot of stuff we come up with might be new takes on stuff we've seen in other games. And we always wonder if other games do the same with us. When I play a game like *BioShock*, which is a more mature title... it's not a platformer, but it's got this whole robust economy and very inventive and imaginative weapons that have a lot of similarities to us. One has to think maybe they have some *Ratchet & Clank* fans on that dev team that were inspired.

Price: Yeah, I talked to Ken Levine at DICE, and he said that they played a lot of *Ratchet & Clank*.

Allgeier: Well, there you go!

Ratchet: Deadlocked

(PS2, 2005)

Insomniac took the series in a slightly darker and more serious direction in *Deadlocked*, with a stronger emphasis on the shooting combat and expanded co-op action with bots and online teammates. "With *Deadlocked*, we focused more on cooperative teamwork," explains Allgeier.

Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters / Secret Agent Clank

(PSP/PS2, 2007 and 2008)

High Impact Games was tapped to bring the series to PSP, with both entries later ported to PS2. *Size Matters* delivered a great handheld take on *Ratchet* gameplay, while the latter spinoff saw Clank reimagined as a James Bond-like spy.

RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE
TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION
PLAYSTATION 3

Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction

(PS3, 2007)

After the more serious tone of *Deadlocked*, the first PS3 *Ratchet* game, *Tools of Destruction*, "came back to the roots of what made the franchise great and focused on creating a spectacular CG-movie-like experience," says Allgeier. He says the next-gen entry offered a "Pixar-like experience," and we wholly agree.

Ratchet & Clank Future: Quest for Booty

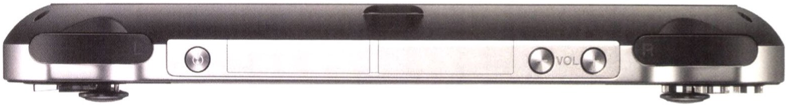
(PSN, 2008)

The first and only downloadable entry in the series was "a smaller game that helped bridge the gap between *Tools of Destruction* and *A Crack in Time*," notes Allgeier, and launched for only $15. It also shined a stronger narrative light on bumbling robot pirates Cronk and Zephyr.

Ratchet & Clank Future: A Crack in Time

(PS3, 2009)

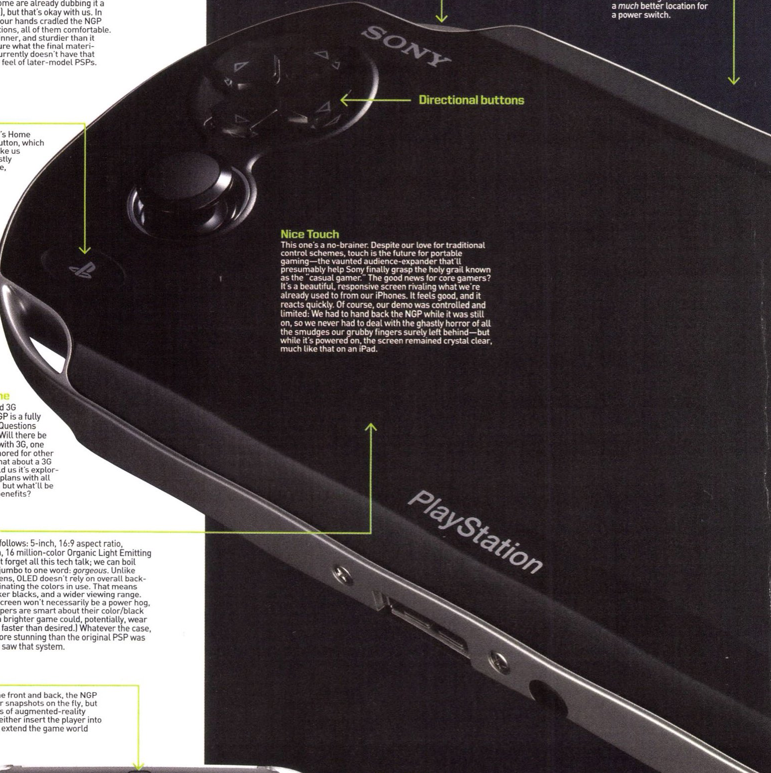
A Crack in Time wrapped up the Future trilogy with deeper character interactions and an emphasis on the time theme. According to Allgeier, "We wanted to focus on Ratchet and Clank's backstories and who they were as characters, and the time mechanic with Clank."



Its codename is awful. Its price has yet to be specified. Its release date remains a mystery. But despite these and several other unknowns, NGP (that's short for the decidedly dull Next Generation Portable)—Sony's successor to the alternately beloved and maligned PSP—has already staked a claim on the hearts and thumbs of gamers worldwide. It's sexy, it's powerful, it's got just about everything we've desired...and a few things we had no idea we wanted. We've got the full hands-on report on what's sure to be the hottest handheld of this decade.

By Gary Steinman

And the winner of the next-generation portable war goes to...



Sexy Figure

Sony is calling the NGP's shape Super Oval Design. We just say *super*. Significantly bigger than a PSPgo and slightly longer than a PSP 3000, the NGP is built for comfort. Yes, it won't fit into a pocket (some are already dubbing it a "backpack device"), but that's okay with us. In our limited demo, our hands cradled the NGP in a variety of positions, all of them comfortable. It's also lighter, thinner, and sturdier than it looks. We're not sure what the final materials will be, but it currently doesn't have that disposable-plastic feel of later-model PSPs.

Power on/off

We can't count how many times we inadvertently put our PSPs into sleep mode when flailing about in an action game. This is a *much* better location for a power switch.

Go Live

Replacing the PSP's Home button is this PS button, which will presumably take us to the new (and vastly improved) interface, dubbed LiveArea.

Nice Touch

This one's a no-brainer. Despite our love for traditional control schemes, touch is the future for portable gaming—the vaunted audience-expander that'll presumably help Sony finally grasp the holy grail known as the "casual gamer." The good news for core gamers? It's a beautiful, responsive screen rivaling what we're already used to from our iPhones. It feels good, and it reacts quickly. Of course, our demo was controlled and limited: We had to hand back the NGP while it was still on, so we never had to deal with the ghastly horror of all the smudges our grubby fingers surely left behind—but while it's powered on, the screen remained crystal clear, much like that on an iPad.

Always On Line

With both Wi-Fi and 3G capabilities, the NGP is a fully connected device. Questions abound, however: Will there be two models—one with 3G, one without—as is rumored for other territories? And what about a 3G data plan? Sony told us it's exploring pay-as-you-go plans with all the major carriers, but what'll be the cost...and the benefits?

It's Organic

The specs read as follows: 5-inch, 16:9 aspect ratio, 960x544 resolution, 16 million-color Organic Light Emitting Display (OLED). But forget all this tech talk; we can boil down the mumbo-jumbo to one word: *gorgeous*. Unlike standard LCD screens, OLED doesn't rely on overall backlighting, only illuminating the colors in use. That means richer colors, blacker blacks, and a wider viewing range. It also means the screen won't necessarily be a power hog, especially if developers are smart about their color/black usage. (That said, a brighter game could, potentially, wear down the batteries faster than desired.) Whatever the case, it's already even more stunning than the original PSP was back when we first saw that system.

Photo Finish

With cameras on the front and back, the NGP is not only set up for snapshots on the fly, but is ready for all kinds of augmented-reality games—ones that either insert the player into the game world, or extend the game world into the real one.

Sony Computer Entertainment Inc.

Backstroking

Possibly the most innovative bit of the NGP's innovativeness, the rear pad doesn't just sport a pleasing Gucci-like repetition of the PlayStation's "sacred geometry," but also functions as a 1:1 touchpad perfect for all manner of gaming applications. Being the exact same size as the front screen allowed us to intuitively place our fingers in the proper positions to trigger what we wanted. Flip the page for more on how we used it in actual games.

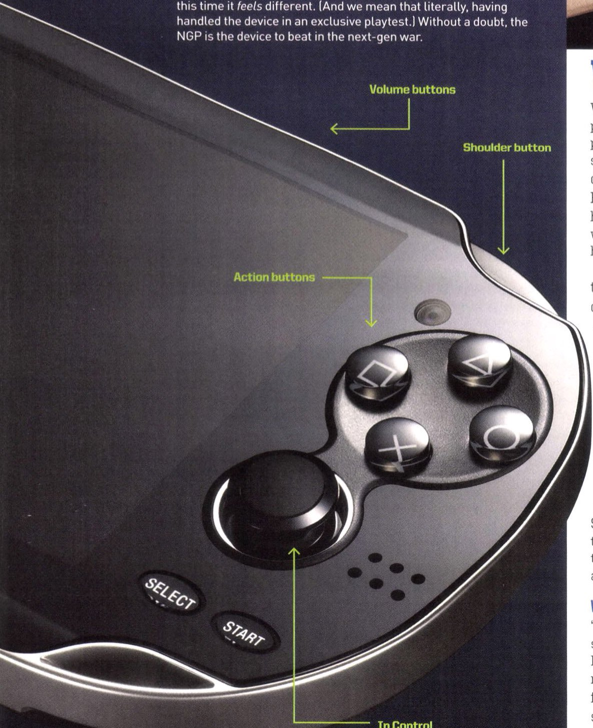
The Cartridge Is Dead...

Long live the cartridge! Abandoning the misguided UMD format, Sony will be delivering games in two ways: via download and in retail stores on a "new game medium" (think Memory Stick, but shorter and fatter). We're not sure where these cards will actually go, but we do know there are plans for two slots: one for games, and one for memory to store other media applications (video, music, photos). The game cards will also have enough extra room for save files as well as downloadable content.

NGP

The Hardware

The goal is as simple as it is grandiose: Sony wants to transform every aspect of our lives into entertainment. Its answer: NGP. Sure, we've heard this before—the unfulfilled promise of a handheld gaming device that'll become our portal to all media, be it music, movies, social networking, and (of course) games. But this time it *feels* different. (And we mean that literally, having handled the device in an exclusive playtest.) Without a doubt, the NGP is the device to beat in the next-gen war.



Move It
Along with the DualShock's familiar Sixaxis motion control (three-axis gyroscope, three-axis accelerometer), the NGP also includes a three-axis compass. Sony claims the motion control is as precise as the Move, and after playing *Uncharted* we're inclined to believe it.

In Control
The second analog stick—the most-requested addition from PSP users—has arrived. The sticks are like those on the DualShock: less nubby, more substantial. Sony is calling them micro-analog, claiming they offer a wider range of response and comfort. Cradling the NGP with both thumbs on the sticks just feels right, and we like it—a lot.

SONY
PlayStation

What'll It Cost?

We should be worried about the price...but we're not. In fact, when we put this question to Shuhei Yoshida, senior vice president of product development at Sony Computer Entertainment, he told us the hardware team not only considered what they wanted in the NGP, but how to make it affordable.

"From the beginning of the project, the price point for consumers was a consideration," says Yoshida. "So we made an effort to carefully choose parts and devices, and *still* be able to meet our target price."

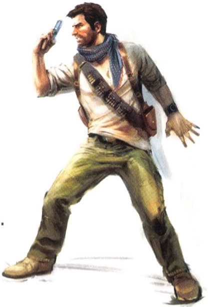
From our conversation, it's clear that lessons were learned from the steep price of both the PS3 and the PSPgo, so we expect a consumer-friendly price—a sentiment echoed by EEDAR analyst Jesse Divnich, who believes NGP will retail at $299 to $349, with games selling at $39.99 to $49.99. (Keep in mind, though, this price doesn't include any additional costs for 3G data plans.)

What About Battery Life?

"Our goal is to be able to provide similar length of gameplay as the PSP," Yoshida says. But does that mean similar to when a UMD is furiously spinning in our PSP? Or similar to when we're playing a downloaded game off a Memory Stick? Either way, we're looking at play times of three to six hours. The elimination of spinning media should certainly help the cause.

Touch, Grab, Trace, Push, Pull

Impressive visuals: Check. Innovative controls: Check. But how does it actually feel? And what about the games? Our hands-on impressions, plus the complete list of currently announced developers and titles.

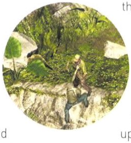


HANDS-ON!

Uncharted

We couldn't think of a better way to begin our love affair with the NGP. Take one of Sony's biggest franchises, deliver a quick slice of gameplay that not only showcases the system's incredible graphics but also includes all kinds of NGP-only control schemes, then put it into our hands to wow us during our first touch with the system.

And wow us it did. Our *Uncharted* demo began in a suitably lush jungle environment, dense with details—and in front of us stood Nathan Drake, ready for action. Our first move: testing the two analog sticks. The right stick handles the camera while the left controls movement, with Drake walking or running forward with ease. We then sprinted down a jungle corridor, encountering a handful of ledges and logs—easily vaulted over with a tap of the X button. At every obstacle, though, we also noticed a small icon behind Drake indicating a touchscreen action, so at the final log, we tapped Drake's back to have him perform the appropriate leap. Soon we came to a vine hanging across a gap, and were able to swing the NGP back and forth to build enough momentum to leap to the other side. Easy, intuitive...but if this were the actual game, we'd probably stick to the face buttons for standard movement and navigation.



Next, we reached a cliff with a vine on it. This is where it got nifty: using the rear pad, we alternately stroked in up/down motions with our two index fingers to simulate climbing. The next cliff face had a series of ledges instead of vines. Here, we tap, tap, tapped up the cliff, either moving from ledge to ledge with individual inputs or "tracing" our way through a series of movements.

When we reached the top, we spotted an enemy coming toward us. Hanging from the ledge, we tapped the enemy, and Drake reached up to toss the goon over the cliff. We then tapped the screen to pick up a rifle he left behind, crept up on another enemy, and tapped him to shove him over the edge of a cliff. Before we could take in the exquisite view, a bullet whizzed by our head, and we hit the Left-shoulder button to look down our rifle's sight. What followed is easily our favorite part of the demo: aiming is accomplished by gently moving the NGP to look around, and once we spotted our foe, we tapped the Right-shoulder to dispatch him with prejudice. Very fun!

HANDS-ON!

Little Deviants

Little Deviants offers a cartoony world that might just be the offspring of arcade classic *Marble Madness* and PS2 hardcore darling *Stretch Panic*. Our demo began in a landscape populated by orange critters whose mischief must be disrupted soley via touch control.

Holding the NGP in our left hand, we slipped our right hand beneath the system to caress the 1:1 rear touchpad. A quick tap beneath a Deviant caused it to leap into the air. When touching the screen, however, the landscape deforms into a wave-like swell that we controlled by swiping our finger across the back pad. Adding another finger extended the width of our hill, allowing us to sweep away several creatures at once. Precision is called for at other times: We noticed a small curved ramp in one area, and guiding a Deviant up and over it netted us bonus points.

The front screen comes into play in several interesting ways. Navigation is managed by moving a finger across the screen, or by tapping icons along the sides to jump to an off-screen Deviant. But the coolest gimmick? With a thumb on top and a forefinger beneath, we pinched a Deviant, pulled back, then let go to slingshot it across the screen. Cool stuff—and a great showcase of the potential inherent in the combo of front and back touchpads.

> "We see this platform as a game-changer with a perfect combination of performance, innovative controls, and gamer appeal that make it truly a high-end console in your pocket."
>
> —Tim Sweeney, founder, Epic Games

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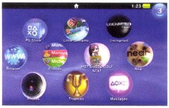
PlayStation



Three more reasons NGP is tops

1. Developers love it
Sony's Shuhei Yoshida: "The immediate, very consistent feedback we get is how easy it is to make games on."

2. It's easier to navigate
LiveArea is a more welcoming interface with game-specific pages including DLC, leaderboards, friends currently playing, and Trophy support!

3. Always connected
With the built-in Near application, NGP can to track our movement, inform us what our neighbors are playing, and allow interaction with local gamers.

Call of Duty

Activision's executive vice president Phillip Earl promised that *Call of Duty* will not only consider the full array of options the NGP has on offer, but will also "set the bar for the next generation of portable gaming." No other details were given, but we're guessing this will be a completely new *Call of Duty*, set in modern times.

Massive Support

Japan 🟩 Europe 🟦
North America 🟥

More than 80 publishers and developers are already signed on to support NGP. Here's the list so far, along with a few key titles already in the works.

Acquire 🟩
Activision
Alvion 🟩
AQ Interactive 🟩
Arc Systems Works 🟩
Arika 🟩
Artdink 🟩
Ascii Media Works 🟩
Avalanche Studios 🟦
Capcom
Capybara Games 🟥
Chun Soft 🟩
Climax Studios 🟦
Codemasters 🟦
Codemasters 🟩
Crafts & Meister 🟩
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D3 Publisher 🟩
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Enterbrain 🟩
Epic Games
Eurocom Developments 🟦
Eutechnyx 🟦
Exient 🟦
Far Sight Studios 🟥
Firemint 🟦
Frima 🟥
From Software 🟩
Gameloft K.K. 🟩
Gameloft SA 🟦
Genki 🟩
Grasshopper Manufacture 🟩
GungHo Online Ent. 🟩
Gust 🟩
Gusto Games 🟦
Hamster 🟩
Home Entertainment Suppliers 🟦
High Voltage Software 🟥
Hudson Soft 🟩
Idea Factory 🟩
Impromptu Software 🟦
Index Corporation (Atlus) 🟩
IREM Software Engineering 🟩
Kadokawa Games 🟩
Kadokawa Shoten Publishing 🟩
Konami
Kung Fu Factory 🟥
Level-5 🟩
Marvelous Entertainment 🟩
Media5 🟩
Namco Bandai 🟩
Nihilistic Software 🟥
Nihon Falcom 🟩
Nippon Ichi Software 🟩
Now Production 🟩
Paramount Digital Ent. 🟥
PopCap Games 🟥
Powerhead Games 🟥
Q Entertainment 🟩
Rebellion 🟦
Rockstar Games 🟦
Sega
Sidhe Interactive 🟦
SNK Playmore 🟩
Sony
Spike 🟩
Square Enix 🟩
Sumo Digital 🟦
SystemSoft Alpha 🟩
Team 17 Software 🟦
Tecmo Koei
Tomy 🟩
Tose 🟩
Trendy Entertainment 🟥
Ubisoft 🟥
Ubisoft Entertainment SA 🟦
Ubisoft K.K. 🟩
Warner Bros. Interactive Ent. 🟥
Yuke's 🟩
Zen Studios 🟦
2K Games 🟥
2K Sports 🟥

Monster Hunter Portable 3rd

The Japanese smash-hit franchise was shown running on the NGP, and looks better than the Wii version that inspired it. Could this be the breakthrough for *Hunter* in the United States?

Dungeon Defenders

Developed by Trendy, this tower defense/action-RPG mashup was ported with one week of development time, purportedly with no reduction in quality from the PS3 original.

Yakuza: Of The End

Although not officially announced for release, this zombified Japanese gangster adventure was ported to the NGP in just three months. Wasted effort? Don't bet on it.

Sony

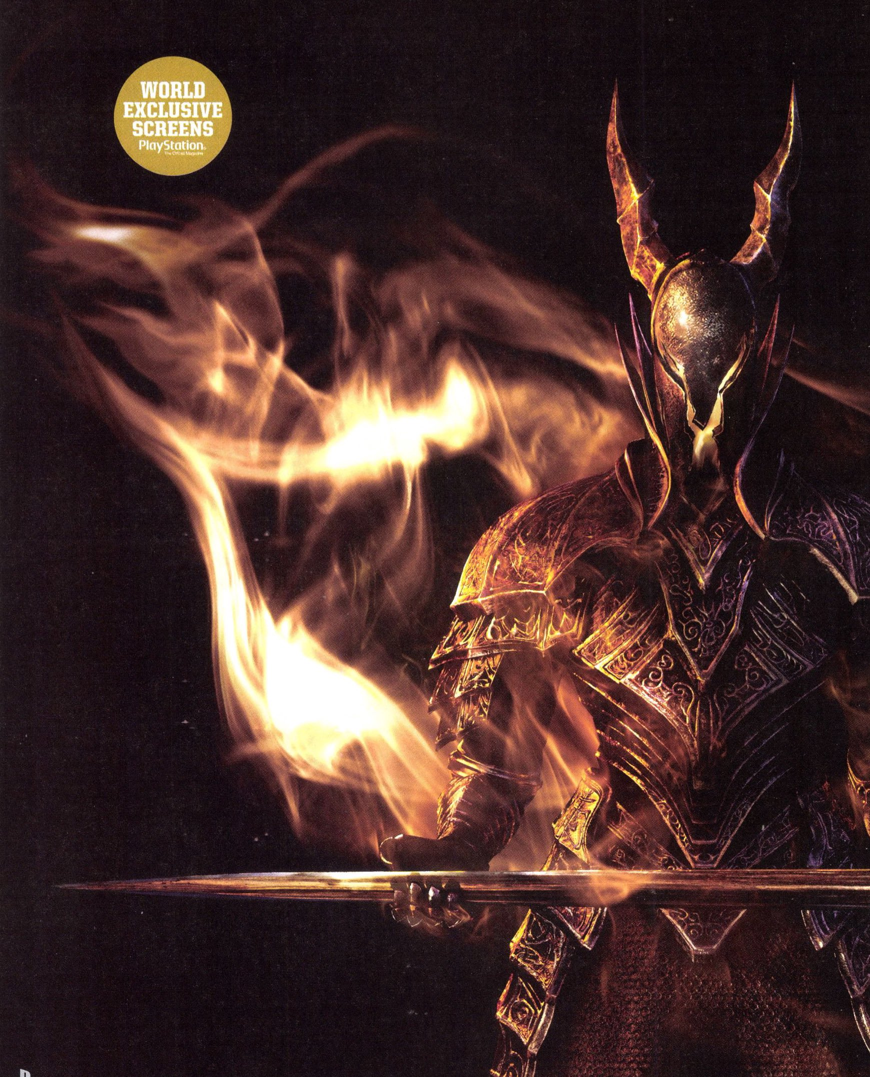
Broken
Gravity Daze
Hot Shots Golf Next
Hustle Kings
Killzone
LittleBigPlanet
Reality Fighters
Resistance
Smart As
WipEout

Dynasty Warriors

More of a tech demo than an actual game announce, Koei showed how its flagship franchise could easily translate to touch control, with a series of swipes and jabs targeting both individual enemies and large groups.

Unnamed Kojima Project

As if showing a gorgeous video of *Metal Gear Solid 4* running on NGP wasn't enough, Konami's Hideo Kojima shared his dream of a cloud-networked gaming environment in which we can take our games from PS3 to NGP and back again. "With the PS3 and NGP we will actually realize this dream," Kojima said. "I am now moving forward with projects for this." No other info was offered, but Kojima promised to reveal more at this year's E3.


WORLD EXCLUSIVE SCREENS
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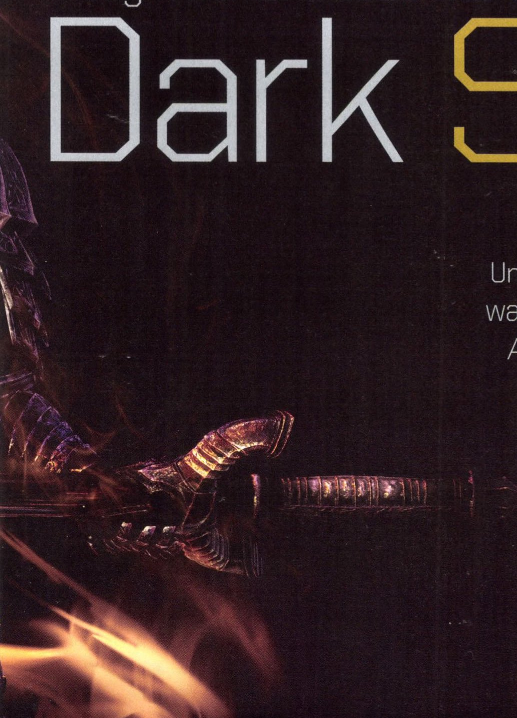
The Official Magazine

Thought Demon's Souls was tough? Get ready for...

Dark Souls

BY JARIK SIKAT

No one saw this coming. Until recently, From Software was best known for the niche *Armored Core* mech games, but with **Demon's Souls** followed by the nostalgic **3D Dot Game Heroes**, the developer is now a hardcore hitmaker.



The Dark Knight Rises

"Getting the awards was beyond my expectations," Hidetaka Miyazaki tells us with a warm, affable smile. Speaking through a translator, Miyazaki further explains his reaction to the critical and commercial success of 2009's PS3 sleeper hit *Demon's Souls*. "To be honest, I'm very lucky, that it got the results that it did. It's not just simply the game design or the game itself but there are other aspects that probably led to the so-called success."

Miyazaki, who joined From Software six years ago, was *Demon's Souls'* director and is leading development on *Dark Souls*. Revealed at Tokyo Game Show 2010 under the name "Project Dark" and set for a U.S. release later this year, *Dark Souls* is neither a sequel nor a continuation, but is widely regarded as *Demon's Souls'* spiritual successor.

The genesis of *Dark Souls* goes back over 15 years to when the Tokyo-based firm, originally a four-person company that set out to develop business applications, decided to gamble on the announcement of Sony's first videogame console and venture into the mad world of game development. Its first attempt, the medieval *King's Field* spawned a dark dungeon crawler series that continued on PS2 until 2002 and seven years later begat an action role-playing game similar in likeness and image, the seminal *Demon's Souls*.

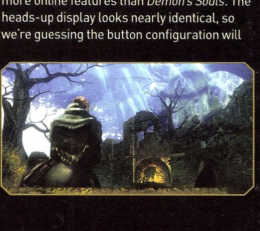
Demon's Souls quickly became known for its nefarious difficulty and for notoriously breaking some of videogaming's basic conventions. Notably, death would send us back to the beginning of the level with all of its enemies respawned—angrier and more aggressive for having to go through the hassle of killing us again.

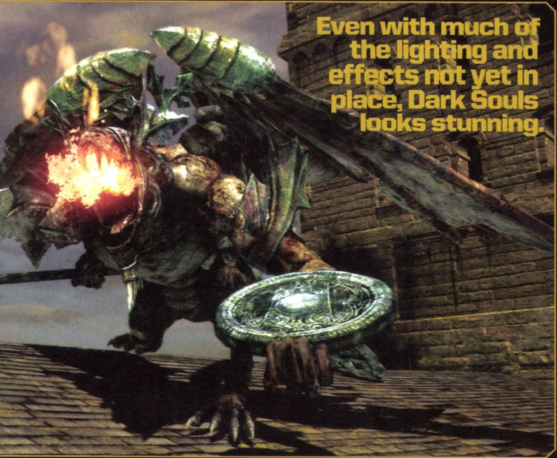
Aside from its threading-needle-while-riding-a-roller-coaster level of hard, what helped garner *Demon's Souls* so many accolades was its groundbreaking use of passive online connectivity throughout the single-player experience. The game let us leave messages on the ground for other players about what lay ahead. In a brilliantly inspired move, red ghosts representing the souls of other real-world players appeared to relive their final moments before death.

Demon's Souls achieved PlayStation's Greatest Hits status last year. In 2009, the title was avalanched with media accolades and awards. So adorned at times, it seemed as if journalists were inventing new awards just to bestow on this trailblazing game. Had From Software made some Faustian pact with the devil?

Into the Heart of Darkness

Miyazaki is walking us through a build that is somewhere between alpha and beta. Even with much of the lighting and effects not yet in place, *Dark Souls* looks stunning. Its play and game mechanics should deliver in a similar fashion; expect *Dark Souls* to have the same style of action, greater difficulty, and even more online features than *Demon's Souls*. The heads-up display looks nearly identical, so we're guessing the button configuration will



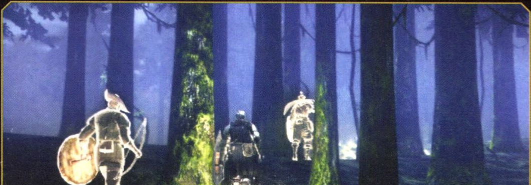


Even with much of the lighting and effects not yet in place, Dark Souls looks stunning.

be similar. However, this time there will be much more role-playing and exploring as, unlike its predecessor, the *Dark Souls* worlds won't be broken down into smaller levels but exist as much larger open worlds.

Starting in the first world, Miyazaki turns a corner, and immediately comes upon an enormous red dragon perched on a medieval stone bridge. Ascending further, a second dragon broods from the uppermost tower. Along the way undead knights emerge. Leaping from a second bridge, we land in a deserted village. Switching to other worlds, we glimpse scenes of a forest and another setting that evolved, as Miyazaki describes it, from a combination of chaos, Asian imagery, and to a certain extent, Buddhist ideologies.

Brief glimpses of combat pitted a sword-and-shield-wielding warrior against a host of skeletons using crossbows from a distance and axes up close. We can counter attacks with our shield, or go full-bore wielding weapons in both hands. Publisher Namco Bandai promises combat will be fearsome, with no safe harbors for us to rest. This is demonstrated quite effectively when our warrior meets a huge troll. Fleeing up a series of ladders doesn't ensure escape; the huge beast climbs up to find us. Luckily, we're able to leap down from heights onto huge enemies to unleash powerful strikes on them. Should our timing be perfect, that is.



Tortured Souls

Haven't played *Demon's Souls* yet? Here are five of the most evil challenges to expect.

Death

Dying transforms you to "soul" form with the health bar maxed at half. You're sent back to the beginning of the level with all enemies respawned, and all souls, the game's main currency, ruthlessly taken away.

Black Phantom Invasions

If you manage to regain your physical form, other real-world players can invade the game at any time and attempt to kill you. Did we mention this is in the single-player mode?

The Valley of Defilement

The most evil of environments. When slogging through the poisonous and plague-filled swamps, you're unable to roll and evade–but enemies are unaffected. Look out for the abundant pitfalls and traps.

The Bosses

The Flamelurker, Maneater, and False King (with his magic and physical attacks) are among the toughest bosses, but there are patterns to beat them. Perhaps the bigger task is getting through each level without repeatedly dying.

The Tower of Latria

Relentless enemies with short- and long-ranged magic and poison attacks infest this often dimly lit prison that features long corridors and few places to hide. Treacherously high walkways could send you plummeting to your death over and over again.

Rear Projection

A look back at From Software's action-RPGs on PlayStation.

King's Field

PSone Pub **Asciiware** Release **1995**

The hero is the sole survivor of a shipwreck, who is seeking out the Moonlight Sword at the request of King Alfred. The non-linear game play was mesmerizing and highly challenging. The game was released in Japan a year earlier as *King's Field II*. With the original never being released in the U.S., the sequel was rechristened *King's Field*.

King's Field II

PSone Pub **ASCII Entertainment** Release **1996**

A dark tempest snatches the Moonlight Sword and King Alfred's soul in the process. Prince Lyle, son of Alfred, must recover the sword and save the king from demonic possession.

King's Field: The Ancient City

PS2 Pub **ASCII Entertainment** Release **2002**

The hero goes on a quest to return the Idol of Sorrow, the cause of the kingdom's blight, to its source—a task previously failed by a thousand-man army.

Demon's Souls

PS3 Pub **Atlus** Release **2009**

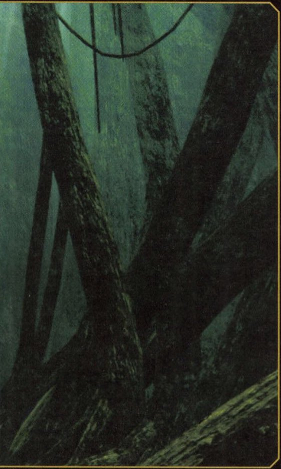
The Moonlight Sword is back in yet another of From Software's dungeon crawlers. Will it make an appearance in *Dark Souls*?

> **Dark Souls is more about a community of players working together and having a shared experience than directly playing together to conquer each mission.**

Soul Brothers

Speaking about *Demon's Souls* passive online functions, what struck a chord with Miyazaki—who possesses a master's degree in sociology—was players' reactions to their own deaths. As infuriating as those moments could be, many players took heart in knowing that their last moments could be learning experiences for other online players.

Dark Souls is more about a community of players working together and having a shared experience than directly playing together to conquer each mission. One example of how Miyazaki is looking to further such single-player network elements is the new beacon fire system. By lighting a beacon fire, we can



establish a location to replenish our health. However, once lit, other players on the network who discover the location can also utilize it to recover in the warm glow of its flames.

Expect to see new equipment and magic. One spell in particular transforms our character into a large black vase, which we can be used as a disguise à la *Metal Gear Solid*. It's patently ridiculous at first; taking control of a vase and slowly sliding along corridors is one of videogames' most goofy moments, but imagine invading someone else's game and waiting in a corner until the unsuspecting victim walks by...

According to Miyazaki, his team can provide the tools and create the world, but as for how players will actually use these tools, he really doesn't know, and that's something he looks forward to seeing.

In terms of story, Miyazaki shared very little, but we do know it involves knights and vampires (and that we could assume both those roles). Though when speaking of the game's setting, he often referred to "chaos," the differences that cause it, and overcoming those differences to defeat it.

Fortune Favors the Brave

From Software's PlayStation gamble is paying off. Now backed by a total staff of over 200 employees, the company is poised to deliver another hit. Miyazaki and his team certainly deserve the accolades and anticipation that's steadily building for *Dark Souls*, but can they live up to expecations?

"There is obviously pressure," says Miyazaki. However, "I'll create the games that I want to create; games I feel users will enjoy. That's what I do best." Miyazaki's lead programmer, Jun Ito, agrees. "Our job is not to feel and react to the pressure, but to continue to strive to achieve our best."

Watching the team, it's evident it's a tight-knit group. Most of *Dark Souls'* staff worked on *Demon's Souls*. They've been through it, so Miyazaki trusts them. "To have a team I can rely on helps reduce the pressure," he tells us.

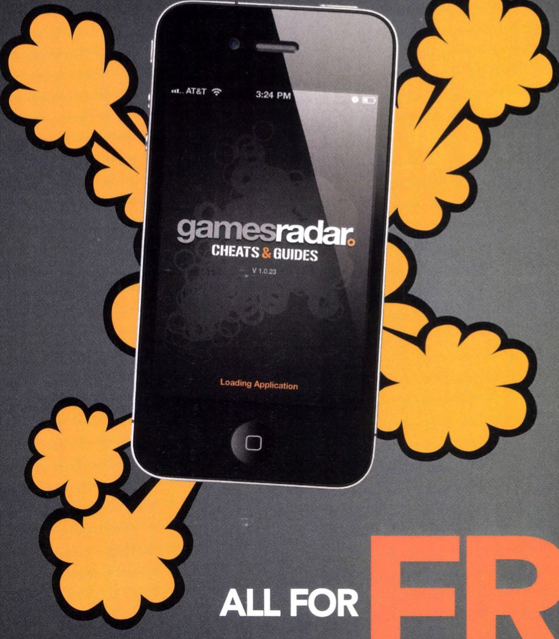
For Makoto Sato, *Dark Souls'* art director, the pressure comes from within. "I always feel I must create a product that will not disappoint. This is not from pressure; it's more from my passion."

Even with major milestones approaching there's a positive feeling in the building. "Each staff member takes on the responsibility to fulfill their individual tasks. This has created a high level of trust...the sense of each member being important is probably the biggest aspect that leads to the team atmosphere," Ito explains. "The sense of creating a game that users will enjoy adds to the positive mood."

That's certainly a good feeling to hold onto as the team pushes forward with what might be the hardest of the hardcore games of 2011.

8652 GAMES WITH CHEATS/ GUIDES/FAQS & WALKTHROUGHS

AND GROWING!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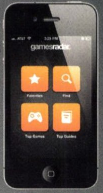
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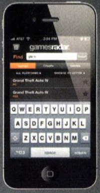
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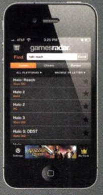
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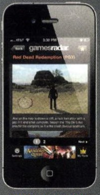
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PlayStation
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Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

Here comes the sun.

The East Coast, as of press time, has been bombarded with snow. People are digging out multiple times a week and it is time for a warming trend to emerge.

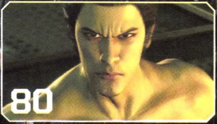
PTOM brings the heat for this issue, possibly enough to melt the snow until next winter. Game companies such as Electronic Arts, Sega, Capcom, and Sony have released a slew of high-profile titles and nostalgia-fueled remakes to remind us all, as the Beatles said, *it's all right*.

In these next 15 pages, we take on massive sequels such as *Yakuza 4*, revisit old friends with *Dragon Age II* and *Bionic Commando: Rearmed 2*, get sweaty with boxing and baseball titles *Fight Night Champion* and *MLB 11: The Show*, respectively. Oh, and we're presented with all-new intrigue in the form of the creatively destructive first-person shooter *Bulletstorm*, and the PS3's first massively multiplayer online game *DC Universe Online*.

Like another non-Beatle noted, *we've got a long way to get there, and a short time to go*. There's a lot of ground to cover and, we suspect, with this amount of criticism-generated heat, the streets will be clear in absolutely no time.

DRAGON AGE II
We quested for the one true pantaloons, marveled at two Sir MixaLot references and used our freedom of choice in this monstrous role-playing game.

BULLETSTORM
Epic Games brings its wacky, hyperbolic brand of first-person shooting to the PS3, daring us to perform all manner of gruesome and creative kills.

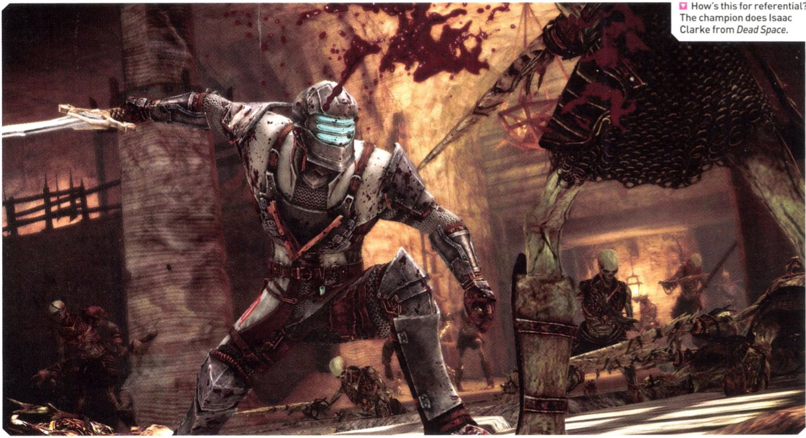


YAKUZA 4
For *Yakuza*'s fourth U.S. outing, Sega has introduced three brand-new seedy protagonists to join the gangster with a heart of gold, Kazuma Kiryu, on his latest face-stomping quest.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome	Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.
9 Excellent	Highly recommended and a great investment.
8 Great	Wonderful yet still possessed of minor flaws.
7 Good	Enjoyable, but with definite room for improvement.
6 Acceptable	A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.
5 Mediocre	A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.
4 Flawed	Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.
3 Poor	A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.
2 Awful	A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.
1 Raw Sewage	Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

Our Highest Accolade
The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.



How's this for referential? The champion does Isaac Clarke from *Dead Space*.

Dragon Age II

Aging beautifully

Info

Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev BioWare
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like epic questing on a smaller stage.

We are the champions, my friends; in a game so referential, it can't hurt to make one more. The action-laden RPG *Dragon Age II* makes us all into heroes or, should we feel inclined toward *tsuris* and *mishegoss*, outright jerkwads. Its riotous ride allows for great adventure, moments of levity, and, of course, bucketsful of gore and championship in equal measure.

Fueled by its brains, a likeable cast, and a sprawling storyline, *Age II* delivers. It's the sort of game with jaws, the kind that consumes lives.

But it's not *Dragon Age: Origins*. And, as such, it merits a warning.

Caveat Emptor

Origins put forth a mammoth storyline wherein we had to save the world. Its quest took us far and wide across the land of Ferelden and had us building an army to defeat a villainous horde ruled over by an archdemon.

This new game offers no world-consuming threat. It's a smaller story with no persistent enemy pushing us toward a cataclysmic finale. It has us staying close to the city of Kirkwall, never straying overmuch, and dealing with internal politics and intrigue far more than we'd care to.

Our human protagonist, the champion of Kirkwall, Hawke, can be male or female. Further, we can choose his specialty: mage, rogue, or warrior. This, too, is a departure from the original game; *Origins* allowed for players to choose their hero's race. Most disappointingly, *Age II* dispenses with individual origin stories for its hero. The original game has six separate storylines in which, say, we could play as a magi, a commoner, or noble dwarf. We gleefully embraced the pre-game choices *Origins* offered, and to see them pared down for the sequel is, at a bare minimum, disheartening.

Age II does carve out its own identity, and its charms are genuine. But it's

Party Hearty The Champion and his allies

Champion
Our character can be male or female, warrior, mage, or thief.

Isabella
A pirate and scoundrel, Isabella wants to find a missing relic.

Aveline
She's the captain of the Kirkwall guard. Don't mess with her.

Varric
This dwarf carries a crossbow he lovingly calls Bianca.

Merrill
New to the big city, Merrill uses foul blood magic.

The pirate Isabella can serve as a romantic interest for both male and female heroes. Yes, the game does have tame, PG-13-level scenes of romance.

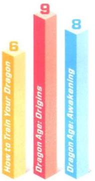
The enigmatic Qunari are camped in Kirkwall and don't want to leave.

smaller and less majestic in its scope than the original.

Casting Call

True to form, BioWare delivers an excellent supporting cast for our champion. Nods to the original game and its expansion are plentiful: Characters such as Zevran the assassin, merchants Bodahn and Sandal, the witch Flemeth, sorcerers Merrill and Anders, and the pirate ship captain Isabella reappear in varying roles.

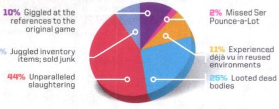
Merrill seems painfully shy. She babbles and her slender, diminutive form makes it seem as if she'll be our team's weak link—a little sister in perpetual need of protection. Yet she uses blood magic, the sort of dastardly wizardry reviled by most of the magic-using population. And she does it openly, without shame. She makes a fine counterpart to the other mage, Anders, who's taken a demon inside of him; and to the worldly, brassy pirate Isabella, who wins at cards because she cheats; and to the more sober and sane captain of the guards, Aveline.



ScorePole

Dragon Age II, as with most all dragon-related games, has some fire in its belly.

What we did in... Dragon Age II



To the point: These characters seem real. And their banter is superb, whether it's Anders musing about his missing pet Ser Pounce-a-Lot or Isabella making another Sir MixaLot reference when she reveals, "I like big boats, and I cannot lie." We want to get to know these people, to explore Kirkwall and its outlying areas with them, and see what they'll do—or say—next.

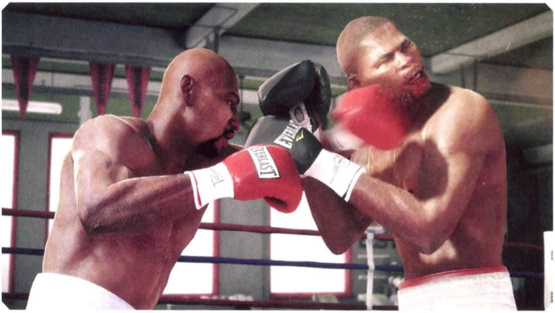
Choose to Fight

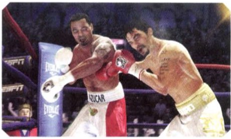
Combat here represents an upgrade from the original game. The real-time combat is fluid and laden with ridiculous flourishes, especially for wizards who swing and twirl their staves with reckless abandon. Blood splatters and explosions punctuate each fight, and characters move to post-brawl cutscenes looking like the world's sloppiest vampires after an extended feeding. The game now requires us to tap X or another face button to perform each and every sword stroke, archery shot, and wand wave, making it impossible to sleepwalk through combat. BioWare also brought the overtly RPG game mechanics to the guillotine, eliminating the awkward moments when archers or wizards would have to physically relocate to assault foes.

Yet combat is only a sideshow act. The true star is the game's willingness to let us choose how we'll live—or die—in Kirkwall. We can choose to be civil, or we can tell the horn-headed Qunari camped within the city to cram it with walnuts. In this way, we can feel tied to this world and its inhabitants, an entanglement we would be foolish to avoid.

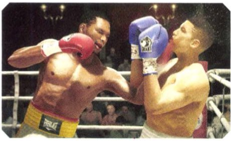
GREG ORLANDO

PlayStation The Official Magazine **9**





We know boxing is a demanding sport, but come on, do boxers really sweat *that* much?



Fight Night Champion

This time, fighting isn't the only story

Cast List

THE HERO

Andre Bishop
Champion mode's protagonist, trying to be king of the ring.

THE SIBLING

Ray Bishop
Andre's "bigger" brother and the requisite family hanger-on.

THE TRAINER

Gus
The famed trainer that also trained Andre's dad.

THE THREAT

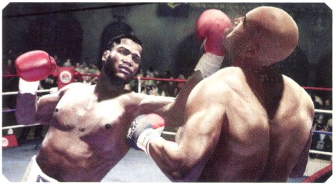
Frost
The current heavyweight champ and a force to be reckoned with.

The gimp on the ropes should be making out with the canvas in short order. Quick flicking jabs set him up for the overhand right and—*BAM!*—Casanova has a date with the ring mat while the referee wonders if he'd get up before a 50-count.

Fight Night Champion blends stunning presentation and story with boxing action in a way no game has before. It intersperses live-action film (as done by Brian Kenney of ESPN's *Friday Night Fights*) with near photo-realistic cutscenes to flesh out the story of boxer Andre Bishop.

Though Champion mode serves as a fine introduction to this pugilistic affair, some real issues tend to hamper play. The referee, inexplicably, cuts in front of the boxers, obscuring the action. Furthermore, the game continues the *Fight Night* tradition wherein we're unable to trap a worn-down fighter in the corner. It's understandable when a fresh boxer can dance away at will, but a lead-footed operator should be an easy target.

EA also stumbles in its attempt to manufacture story elements. One fight begins after our boxer has broken his hand. The next fight begins with our fighter receiving a dangerous cut. The fight after demands body shots on an opponent, but almost each successful hit is hailed as an illegal blow. These events, placed one after another, rip the player out of an immersive story.



Info

Format PS3 **Pub** EA Sports
Dev EA Canada **Price** $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like science, if they added sweet, delicious sugar to it.

Yet the rest of the picture is almost as sweet as the sweet science itself. A new blood smear system shows off the sport's more gruesome nature. The game now allows for "flash knockouts," one-hit wonders that come out of nowhere to end a fight. This keeps the game more in line with real-world boxing. Blows thunder on an enemy's body and face, and impactful punches are emphasized with a shift to slow motion or a quick little stagger performed by the assaulted party. A stamina system highlights the need for fuel in the tank, so to speak: If our fighter is working off no stamina, his punches will be a slow, weak combination of a push and a slap. With the proper stamina, our fists fly and the jabs snap crisply.

Legacy mode allows us to create a fighter from scratch or don the gloves of a classic boxer like Muhammad Ali or Mike Tyson, taking him from the basement to the big time with hard work and the successful completion of a series of minigames. Here we earn experience and build our fighter to suit our play style. Best of all, the fighter can then be taken online to prove he is, in fact, a true *Fight Night* champion.

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SHANE ZACHARY

Bionic Commando Rearmed 2

One swing forward, two back

Info

Format PSN
Pub Capcom
Dev Fat Shark
Price $14.99
ESRB Teen
It's like having to spend several hours with a homeless vet.

Forget the disappointing *Bionic Commando* reboot that stank up the PS3 back in 2009—this is a sequel to *Bionic Commando: Rearmed*, the tough-as-nails PSN delight that updated a Capcom classic with gorgeous high-definition visuals. As with its predecessor, *Rearmed 2* focuses on the extendable arm of Nathan "Rad" Spencer and how it enables him to swing from platform to platform or reach out to grasp a ledge for a last-second save. Every level is designed around this ability, so the result is a game with a distinct structure and sense of momentum.

However, the overall design and swing mechanics aren't as balanced as they were in the first *Rearmed*. Some areas end way too soon, while others drag on with more emphasis on shooting and switch-pulling than gravity-defying leaps of faith.

The arm still provides a cool twist on the well-tread 2D platformer formula, but this is a case where—despite new features like the ability to jump (a series first)—the sequel actually feels like a scaled-back version of the original.

6

BRETT ELSTON

Faery Legends of Avalon

Format **PSN** Pub **Focus Home Interactive** Dev **Spiders** Price **$14.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Magic is fading from the world and it's our job to save it, or so goes the premise of this fantasy adventure role-playing game. Flying our custom-created faeries through imaginative environments and past enchanting creatures proved interesting but not particularly memorable, though the simple flight controls actually function surprisingly well. Not much else about *Faery* is deep or soulful, but for a modestly priced PSN download, it's a decently entertaining way to flitter away a dozen hours.

6

ANNE LEWIS

de Blob 2

Format **PS3** Pub **THQ** Dev **Blue Tongue** Price **$49.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Anti-Communist themes can't keep a good platformer down. Comrade Black has drained Prisma City and its inhabitants of color, and Blob, the "polychromatic" hero, must restore the city's vibrant hues. Missions become repetitive since we can only spend so much time pummeling civilians before it becomes a chore, but the game's vibrant visuals and the progressive addition of new enemies and skills kept the experience fresh. Exuberantly colorful and open landscapes blend with platforming puzzles to form a union worth getting excited over. Better red than dead, right?

7

ANNE LEWIS

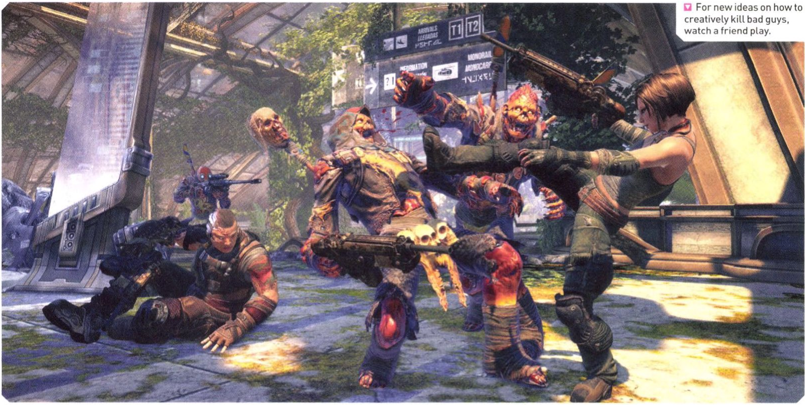
Mindjack

Format **PS3** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **Feel Plus** Price **$59.99** ESRB **Mature**

Not even heaping spoonfuls of influence from *Inception*, *The Matrix*, *Metal Gear Solid*, and *Resident Evil* can save Square Enix's dreadful shooter *Mindjack*. Worthless melee attacks, feeble grenades, awful collision detection, and a broken control scheme were enough to send us digging through the trash for our receipts. Worse still, the main campaign plods along like an insurance seminar. We love the idea of controlling defeated enemies' minds and using these subservient souls as combat partners or diversionary sitting ducks, but the execution here is simply irredeemable.

3

RUSSELL GARBUTT

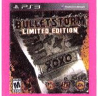


For new ideas on how to creatively kill bad guys, watch a friend play.

Bulletstorm

Come for the killing, stay for the fart jokes

Info



Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev People Can Fly/ Epic Games
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like someone gave the football team guns. Really big guns.

There aren't enough "F-ck yeah!"s in the world to accurately describe *Bulletstorm*. Epic Games' new first-person shooter franchise packs so much tongue-in-cheek machismo and comically exaggerated action we're going to run out of ways to say "over-the-top." Its key selling point (and the secret to its unpretentious appeal)? We don't just mindlessly mow down enemies; instead, we must flex our creativity to earn points by dispatching foes in the most intricate way possible, oftentimes without using a gun at all.

The cornerstone of this old-school, arcade-inspired system: skillshots—point bonuses awarded when we complete specific types of hilarious murder. From kicking enemies into giant cacti to slide tackle/headshot combos, skillshots come in every flavor imaginable, all of which prove absolutely addictive. Receiving an instant payoff for dropping an elevator on some chump is inherently satisfying, but executing skillshots also evokes the same sense of discovery and reward that *Tony Hawk Pro Skater's* gaps so perfectly captured. It's definitely a unique sensation to experience in a modern FPS.

Killing Spree

At certain points, however, skillshots became an obligation—we were often so concerned with achieving specific kills that we actually forgot to have fun. We also had a tough time remembering all the possible permutations and ended up executing the same handful over and over again—especially later in the game when we encountered enemies who were too fast to grab or had to be shot in specific weak spots (both of which felt contrary to the game's creative core). But even with the double-edged nature of skillshots, we appreciate how the point system fundamentally changed our approach to the game. We're not sure we'll ever be able to go back to *just* shooting guys.

Besides, skillshots aren't the only thing *Bulletstorm* has to offer. In keeping with the game's fist-bumping

Five Good Reasons To vacation on Bulletstorm's planet

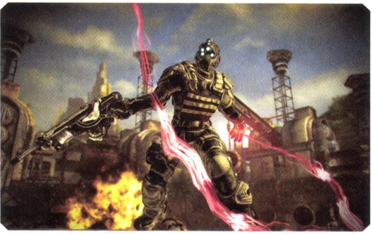
ENTERTAINMENT
The fun never stops when heavily armed and drunk.

HOSPITALITY
The local population embraces new visitors.

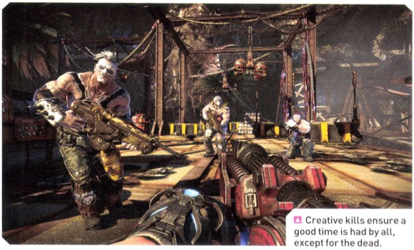
EXOTIC WOMEN
They melt hearts and kick asses in equal measure.

NATURAL BEAUTY
Simply stunning, but watch out for the man-eating flora.

ACCOMMODATIONS
The five-star locales offer much for discerning tourists.



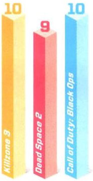
Charge shots, slides, kicks, and a lasso—Grayson Hunt has no shortage of special abilities to unleash on foes.



Creative kills ensure a good time is had by all, except for the dead.

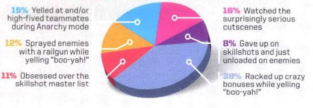
mentality, the weaponry is best described as *totally sweet*. The most essential tool is the leash—an electronic lasso that allowed us to tether enemies and either slam them into the ground or reel them in like *Mortal Kombat's* Scorpion. At times it felt like the leash did our work for us since we barely had to aim it, but the (often unexpected) results were consistently badass. Ripping pilots from their choppers and shooting them midair proved particularly gratifying.

Then there are the guns, which are almost offensively gratuitous: a four-barreled shotgun, an assault rifle with infinite ammo, a sniper rifle that fires slow-motion guided bullets that can be detonated at any time, and a specialty weapon called the Penetrator, which launches spinning drill bits into unsuspecting foes. And those are just our favorites. Every gun looks, feels, and sounds powerful, and though the aiming mechanics felt slightly loose, that only enhanced the over-the-top action. Combined with the game's novel environments and considerable play variety—with boss battles, rail shooting segments, and unique scenarios galore—*Bulletstorm* easily succeeds as a shooter.



ScorePole
Bulletstorm stands tall but can't quite top other shooters.

What we did in... Bulletstorm



On the Hunt

Strangely, the story is completely at odds with all the lighthearted gameplay. It follows Grayson Hunt—a disillusioned, self-loathing soldier with a heart of gold and a checkered past who seeks to atone for his many sins by toppling a corrupt military leader. As cliché as that sounds (and ultimately *is*), it's done without a hint of irony and stops just short of parody. Though the story doesn't necessarily drag the experience down, it certainly feels out of place when juxtaposed with the goofy, juvenile action. "Your entire crew is dead, and it's all your fault. Now shoot this guy in the nuts for bonus points! LOL!" See what we mean?

Our only serious grievance is the unforgivable non-ending (which might as well come with a press release for *Bulletstorm 2* and *3*), but the game's pleasantly crass, off-the-wall buddy banter helped soften the blow. Its undying passion for dick jokes gradually grew tiresome, but it never fully stopped being entertaining.

The ending is also partially redeemed by the replay-worthy Echoes mode (a series of high score challenges featuring short campaign sections) and the genuinely challenging Anarchy mode (a horde mode where teams must survive waves of enemies but also attain a point goal). Both offer a legitimate alternative to more typical *Call of Duty*-style shooter fare by playing to the game's unique strengths: hilarious kills and score whoring. What could be more fun than that?

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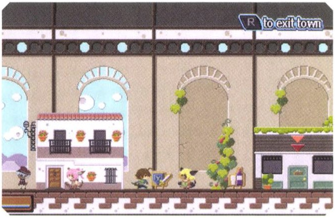
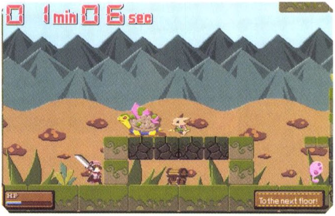
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Jikandia The Timeless Land

There's always time for a game



Jikandia adjusts its levels to match the time limits we set. It's a neat gimmick, although the game could use more platformer polish.



Info

Format PSP **Pub** Aksys Games
Dev Opus **Price** $29.99
ESRB Teen **It's like** 2011's answer to the '80s arcade classic *Solomon's Key.*

Seemingly designed for people who make YouTube speed-run videos, *Jikandia: The Timeless Land* is fun for the rest of us too...but only to a point. This is an old-fashioned puzzle-action-platform game focused on bouncing around the world and beating up bad guys, with some quick thinking on the side. The main character can use a broad selection of weapons and sidekick characters tag along to dish out special attacks.

What shakes things up is the time-limit system. *Jikandia's* levels are timed, but the player actually sets his own time limit and the game adjusts the stage layout accordingly: A longer limit means more time to collect powerups, while a shorter one translates to a bigger challenge at the end. While beating the bosses is a principal goal, so is exploring every little nook and collecting heaps of items.

Of course, there'd be more incentive to explore if the physics and controls were better tuned. *Jikandia* doesn't feel responsive enough, lacking substantial audio and tactile feedback to go along with its jumps, attacks, and defense.

The basic concept is clever enough, though, so the game could have emerged as a real cult classic had it possessed stronger fundamentals. DAVID F. SMITH

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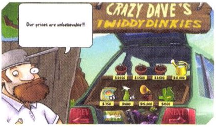

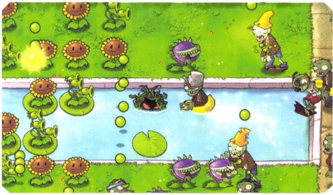

Plants vs. Zombies

Growing a bumper crop

The zombies are at the gates, but thank our green thumbs we have nature to defend hearth, home, and our precious cerebrums. Dropping plants on our grid-like lawn helps repel the rapidly approaching undead, and when basic pea shooting proves insufficient, we have potato mines, watermelon catapults, and more to decimate—or at least impede—the foe.

This here is tower defense done right. Whether we're defending our lawn and its lovely pool or taking the fight to our rooftop, the game pushes simple, goofy fun with a good deal of strategy behind it. We have to manufacture and manage our sunlight in order to maintain an ample supply of currency to purchase troops. And we have to decide which herbaceous defender can best counter, say, the rotting football hero or the yeti zombie.

The rampaging horde offers an unceasing challenge, but we can counter and thwart if we play smart and if we're nimble enough to recognize and repair any weak spots in our defenses. And when we're done with the lengthy campaign (which features both day and night scenarios), *Plants vs. Zombies* generously provides mini-games and an imposing, multi-staged survival mode.

There's a reason why PopCap has ported this game to almost every platform under the sun, and its embrace of zombiemania only hints at it. As with brains (we would assume) this is *delicious.* GREG ORLANDO

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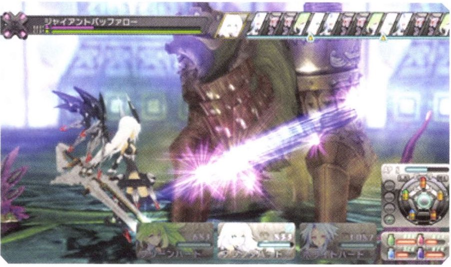
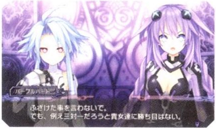
Info

Format PSN
Pub SCEA
Dev PopCap Games
Price $14.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like tower defense with more flora and brain eating.



Hyperdimension Neptunia

A march to victory in the console wars... sort of


ふざけた事を言わないで。
でも、例え三対一だろうと貴女達に勝ち目はない。

Trust us: Most of you won't get what these girls are going on about, even in English.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** NIS America **Dev** Compile Heart **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Teen **It's like** 2channel's gaming board made an RPG.

There are two reactions *Hyperdimension Neptunia* will likely inspire in people. Some will effusively love all the meta-textual in-jokes and pastel anime 12-year-olds with breast implants. Many more, meanwhile, will grind their teeth in rage at the saccharine horror of it all. This creates a dilemma for reviewers like us: Do we score the game according to the reaction of the vast majority or according to the reaction of the niche that the game is obviously aiming for?

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. *Neptunia* is part dungeon-hack RPG and part extended joke at the expense of gaming fandom. In the world of Gamindustri (really), four goddesses known as Consoles (again, really) engage in an endless, pointless battle for supremacy. When Neptune, our heroine, is defeated by her rivals (the PlayStation, Xbox, and Wii personified...really), she is cast out of the heavens and transformed from a chesty high-tech goddess to a cutesy pre-teen in striped socks. After coming to grips with her sudden transformation, she sets out to regain her rightful place and win the Console War. Really.

Wallowing in the silliness might be more fun if this were a better RPG. Sadly, combat is slow and fiddly, the dungeon designs are dead simple and often re-used, and the models and animation would have been behind the times a generation ago. It plays like a poorly tuned imitation of the *Xenosaga* series, which isn't exactly an ideal model of game design.

That leaves *Neptunia* to coast on its sense of humor and it isn't quite funny enough. There are moments where the inside-baseball style works well—the classic-game-inspired special attacks are hilarious—but it's not at all consistent. In any case, only a serious game geek is going to get the majority of the references, especially since they skew toward the old school. Gamers born after 1988 or so are liable to feel very lost.

As for the 12-year-olds with implants...well, for better or for worse, it's a style that has a following. Members of that following can mentally kick up the score by a couple of points. Most everyone else can pass this one by and spare their teeth some trauma.

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DAVID F. SMITH

DLC Roundup

Mass Effect 2 N7 Complete Arsenal Bundle

Price **$7.99** **ESRB** **Mature**

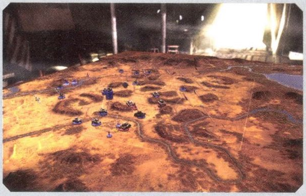
When only a handful of death-dealing implements simply won't do, it's time to supersize. This bundle provides all six of *Mass Effect 2's* available weapon and armor upgrade packs to allow for maximum firepower and unparalleled destruction. Happy hunting.

ModNation Racers Unlock All Key

Price **$2.99** **ESRB** **Everyone**

They say cheaters never prosper. Boy, were they wrong. For those of us who want to dive into the deep waters of *ModNation Racers'* customization-heavy content but don't have the patience to unlock every little item in the game, this key unlocks the whole shebang in one fell swoop.

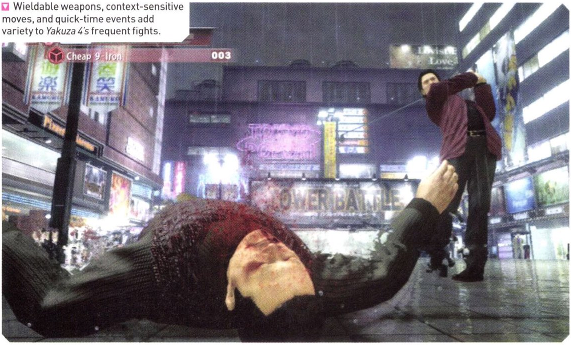
Download of the Month



R.U.S.E. The Chimera Pack

Price $9.99 **ESRB** Mature

Giving another meaty boost to both solo and multiplayer gameplay, the Chimera pack dishes out three new multiplayer skirmish maps—Nuclear Winter, Blood and Sand, and Djebel—featuring new terrain to wage war upon. On the single-player front, there are three exclusive challenges spread out over different operational theaters.



Wieldable weapons, context-sensitive moves, and quick-time events add variety to *Yakuza 4's* frequent fights.

The devs have devoted as much care to the exquisite cutscenes as our friend is on his gun.

Yakuza 4

A yen for violence

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Sega
Dev CS1 Team **Price** $59.99
ESRB Mature **It's like** the best-looking PS2 crime game ever.

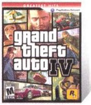
Like the characters populating its Japanese criminal underworld, *Yakuza 4* is flawed. It's a mish-mash of divergent experiences ranging from fascinating to exasperating, wrapped in gameplay that's both charming and archaic.

While series protagonist Kazuma Kiryu—the reluctant Yakuza clan boss with a heart of gold—returns in this fourth entry, he shares the spotlight with three other playable characters: Akiyama (a loan shark with a heart of gold), Saejima (a Yakuza soldier with a heart of gold), and Tanimura (a corrupt cop...with a heart of gold). Each character receives about a quarter of the screen time as he uncovers the secrets surrounding a Yakuza boss hit that occurred 25 years ago.

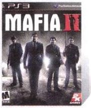
Unraveling the mystery requires brawling, exploring, and chatting up the inhabitants of Kamurocho (a realistic but fictionalized Tokyo red-light district) and various other secondary Japanese locales. The environments in the game are meticulously recreated, but they lack the scope and intricacy of the best openworld crime games.

Whether being accosted by street thugs or facing off against more skilled rivals, brawling is a major preoccupation in the game. The simplistic fighting is buttonmash-friendly, and a RPG-style level-up system allows for the acquisition of more intricate and powerful moves, but confrontations are less about showing off skill than enjoying the gratuitously violent bashings. Unadulterated brutality has its charms, but being forced into random frays on the way to our next objective proved grating at times.

Like This? Play these



Grand Theft Auto IV
Still the kingpin of openworld crime games, and an incredible bargain at its current Greatest Hits price point.
VERDICT 10



Mafia II
Empire Bay isn't as fleshed out as *GTA's* Liberty City, but this '50s-era mob tale is worth exploring.
VERDICT 8

Free exploration has always been a *Yakuza* series hallmark, but the delight of making surprising discoveries seems diminished here. Perhaps that's because *Yakuza 4* is much more transparent about story-advancing objectives: it either plainly states the next location or physically prohibits access to areas unrelated to the task at hand. While this streamlines plot advancement, it feels inelegantly restrictive for an openworld game.

Character interactions are also a mixed bag. The gorgeous (and abundant) cutscenes feature emotive animations and superb voice acting—something that may be lost on U.S. gamers as there is no dubbed dialogue, only captions. But while the cinematics are enthralling, they're often interspliced with game sequences featuring robotic character animations and reams of expository text. The X button may require an extended warranty as it's tasked with advancing the narrative—one sentence at a time.

Beyond the core crime adventure, *Yakuza 4* is loaded with side-quests and mini-games. The diversions range—to name a few—from mentoring a dojo's fighters to wooing women in hostess bars to playing a round of billiards or hitting at batting cages. It's a shotgun approach that seems superfluous, but one imbuing the *Yakuza* experience with its own quirky signature—and compelling us to continually return to the streets of Kamurocho.

But for hardcore *Yakuza* fans, the schizophrenic game design is secondary; it's the engrossing characters and storyline that matter most. Initially, every figure in *Yakuza 4* seems one-dimensional or ridiculously stereotyped in a tale rife with absurd or unlikely plot twists. Yet, a depth emerges as layers of the story are peeled away, and in the end we're left with something not often found in games: an examination of profoundly human themes such as retribution, regret, and redemption. ROGER BURCHILL

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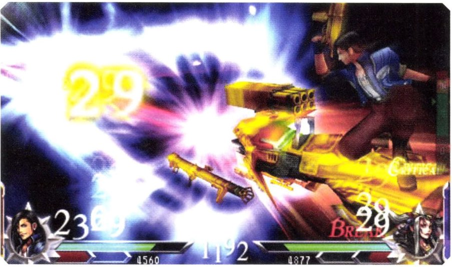

Dissidia 012[duodecim] Final Fantasy

When Fantasies collide

Both a mouthful to say, and offering more than a handful of play, *Dissidia 012[duodecim]: Final Fantasy* packs a lot of role-playing (roughly 50-plus hours) onto one UMD.

A prequel to *Dissidia: Final Fantasy*, this new *Dissidia* provides for real-time, one-on-one battles pitting some of *Final Fantasy's* most popular heroes—among them Lightning, Vaan, Yuna, Laguna, and Tifa—against the forces of the god Chaos.

New to the party is an exploration system; game events are no longer relegated to a grid-like map. Running around, finding aimlessly floating moogles waiting to sell us equipment, and either clobbering or avoiding wandering monstrosities helps fix this game in the *Final Fantasy* universe. It's a welcome touch.

When it's time to brawl, the game launches us into a series of multi-leveled battlefields laden with destructible junk. We can launch our heroes into the air, jet along preset trails, and assault our foes with all manner of destructive attacks. Here, the game takes a knock; fully 3D combat systems featuring mid-air clashes have traditionally been hard to pull off, and *duodecim's* is no exception. An enemy locator arrow adjusts the alignment of our hero's body so he's (in theory) always facing the opposition, but the camera continuously jerks and swerves to accomplish this feat, which oftentimes proves problematic.

Lightning from *Final Fantasy XIII* gets unexpected results from her hand lotion.

Info

Format PSP **Pub** Square Enix
Dev Square Enix **Price** $29.99
ESRB Teen **It's like** a *Fantasy* fight club with fanciful flourishes and fabulous hair.

Yet there's a clever strategic element to *duodecim's* warfare. We're encouraged to sap an enemy's bravery—the measure of attack power—thus boosting our own attack before directly assaulting him. The terrain can also be used to our advantage, blocking enemy attacks and allowing for strategic ambushes. In this way, by using bravery attacks and the environment, we can, quite plausibly, take down a stronger foe.

The game also allows us to call in an ally for powerful strikes, use monstrous summons, and boost our heroes' powers with all manner of accessories, weapons, and armors. Regardless of whether we're fully controlling our hero or using simplified, RPG-style battle commands mapped to the PSP's face buttons (move, fight, finisher, defend), *duodecim* earns its keep by challenging us to use our brains as well as our flying fingers of fury. GREG ORLANDO

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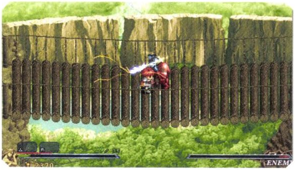
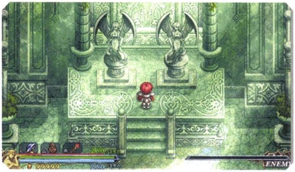


Fights are accomplished by ramming Adol into enemies.



Ys I & II Chronicles

No school like the old school

Info

Ys I & II Chronicles

Format PSP
Pub XSEED Games
Dev Falcom
Price $29.99
ESRB Teen
It's like push comes to shove in an old-school RPG.

Considering this is an enhanced version of two action-RPGs from the late 1980s, *Ys I & II Chronicles* contains a few quirks that may befuddle modern players. The main oddity is its simplistic battle system, which has players bumping the main character, Adol, into enemies to fight. The amount of damage Adol causes and/or takes depends on the weapons and armor he has equipped as well as the angle of his attack.

This combat style may turn off those raised on recent adventures, but fans of retro flavor are in for a treat. The gameplay may be dated, but it's also no-nonsense. No time is wasted on elaborate set pieces or drawn-out cinema sequences. This game is about fast action, and it delivers plenty of it with style. The updated graphics look great, and the soundtrack—which has always been one of gaming's best—sounds better than ever. *Ys* fans will also appreciate the ability to choose among two different sets of character art and three different versions of the soundtrack.

Both *Ys I* and *II* are relatively short and light on story, but played in succession, they form a very decent retro RPG package. PHIL THEOBALD

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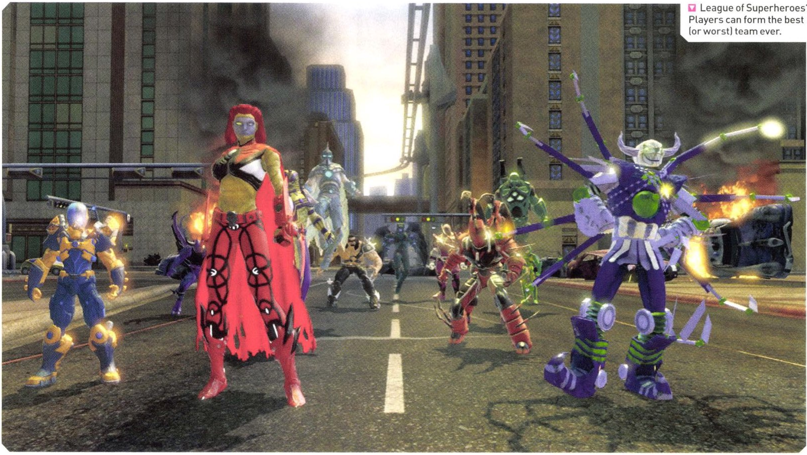

League of Superheroes' Players can form the best (or worst) team ever.

DC Universe Online

With great power comes great supercrushings

Walking out into the streets of Gotham City for the first time was awe-inspiring. The Bat-signal casting its glow on the clouds, the henchmen in clown makeup patrolling an abandoned theme park, the icy hospital surrounded by Mr. Freeze's thugs—it was all there, just as we'd seen it in countless comic books. Somewhere in the city, Robin was battling Harley Quinn, and we were on our way to help. Not to help *him*, mind you, but to help take down the Boy Blunder before he made off with the Joker's secret chemical recipe. *DC Universe Online* is full of memorable moments like these, immersing us in the world of comic books while successfully bringing the massively multiplayer role-playing genre to consoles like never before.

Multi Massive

Fears that the PS3 version of Sony Online Entertainment's comic crusade would be inadequate can be definitively put to rest: Everything about the game is well optimized for play on a console—from the physical, action-based combat to the focus on shorter, repeatable missions. The controls, the visuals, even the way in which we navigate menus feels right in line with other RPGs on the system. Technical hiccups such as framerate drops, slow-loading textures, and server issues detract from the overall experience, but MMOs frequently have teething problems at launch; we expect these problems to fade away.

Patrolling the streets of Gotham and Metropolis is never a drag, thanks to a steady stream of entertaining content. Nearly every task we were assigned was part of a chain of quests, culminating in confrontations with some of the most well-known characters in comics. Fighting side by side with

Info

PS3
DC Universe Online

Format PS3
Pub Sony Online Entertainment
Dev SOE Austin
Price $59.99 (plus a $14.99 monthly subscription fee after the first 30 days)
ESRB Teen
It's like getting sucked alive into 60 years worth of comic books.

Five Reasons Why it's good to be bad

Gorilla Grodd
We teamed with Grodd to turn two Flashes into apes. Commence punching!

The Hall of Doom
A labyrinthine lair of evil awaits to play host to our fiendish machinations.

The Joker
We don't want to know anyone who wouldn't want a clinically insane clown as his mentor.

Insane Cackling
Laughing in the manner of a supervillain is one of life's simplest, and greatest, pleasures.

Bizarro
On Bizarro World, socks wear people. Book us the on the first flight out.

▲ Fun Fact: Superman once had a supermonkey (Beppo) and a superhorse (Comet). Super.

▼ Keep a keyboard handy; voice chat doesn't always function perfectly, and communication is key.

iconic figures is a pleasantly regular occurrence in *DCUO*, and there's nary a moment where we weren't being contacted by different heroes or villains with new objectives. Plus, making a new character and changing sides or simply choosing a different mentor can lead to unexpected new experiences and storylines.

Super Friends

The trek to level 30 (the game's current level cap) takes about as many hours. While that might sound light when compared to other MMOs, *DCUO* isn't hurting when it comes to longevity. In fact, it's here the game gets its second wind, with the solo-heavy gameplay of its early portions replaced by fast and challenging group play. Players will need to adapt to fighting in repeatable duos, four-player Alerts, 10-player Raids, and player-vs.-player instances in order to gain end-game rewards.

Some may tire of repeating missions after level 30, but there's something to be said about cutting the fat that usually fills the early-game grind and skipping straight to the good stuff. At the very least, it's worth playing through to the level cap just to fight alongside the most recognizable characters in comics. Or to beat them senseless.

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HOLLANDER COOPER

Gods Eater Burst

Big monsters, bigger sword

Info

Format PSP
Pub D3Publisher
Dev Shift/Namco
Price $39.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a portable pacifier for monster-hunting addicts.

Hunting massive monsters with even bigger weapons is what *Gods Eater Burst* is all about. This monster-slaying RPG offers an intriguing story in which the world has been ravaged by entities called Aragami. After enlisting as an Aragami-hunting Gods Eater and equipping a God Arc—a powerful bio-weapon that can devour enemies and take on the form of a sword, gun, and shield—we were quickly hooked by the absurdly over-the-top combat.

Polished graphics, smooth framerates, and blisteringly fast battles kept us playing for hours. Each Aragami is vulnerable to specific types of weapons and bullets, so preparing an appropriate arsenal is essential for survival. Later levels can get frustrating, requiring an assortment of highly upgraded equipment and bullets to avoid being demolished in two hits, but downing a monster after an intense 15-minute brawl is as satisfying as chomping on—we imagine—an Aragami-flavored steak.

Burst also boasts deep character customization and a unique bullet-creation feature. Want to make a bullet that rains down destruction in the form of frost lasers and sticky bombs? It's entirely possible—although bullet crafting is a complex process that requires a lot of trial and error.

Sadly, multiplayer is limited to ad hoc wireless cooperative play and the unhelpful A.I.-controlled teammates serve as little more than monster munch. Though *Gods Eater Burst* is an enjoyable romp, be prepared to go on this hunt alone.

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RYAN TALJONICK

Ar tonelico Qoga Knell of Ar Ciel

Don't let mom see this

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** NIS America
Dev Gust **Price** $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like *Tales of Softcore.*

In the *Ar tonelico Qoga* world, magic spells work better when female spellcasters take their clothes off. No, that's not a joke, which sums up this RPG: it's either silly or creepy, depending on the player's sense of humor and sense of shame.

The *Ar tonelico* series has always had a weird voyeuristic dimension, including an entire gameplay sub-system for "diving into" the heroines' unconscious minds. (Supposedly this is theraputic, but the sexual implications are not well hidden.) But those who weren't offended before aren't likely to have their minds changed here.

What will influence minds is the leap to 3D graphics. Typically that causes growing pains, and that's the case with *Qoga*—especially during combat. The system features real-time action, but the animation is disjointed, the control response is inconsistent, the interface distracting, and it's tough to get a good, expansive view of the battlefield.

Checking out this goofy cartoon peep show without being embarrassed is difficult, but keeping the in-game party from dying is even harder. Either way, there's more titillation than fun in *Qoga*. DAVID F. SMITH

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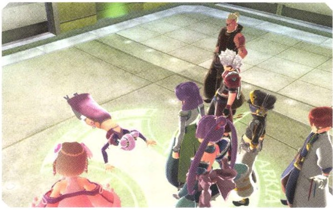
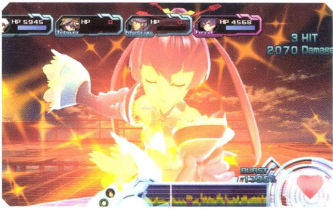
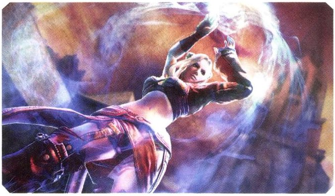
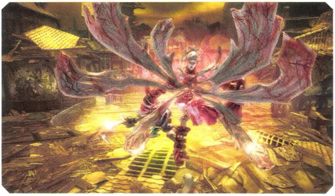


△ *Qoga's* high-def 2D backgrounds look sharp, but the new 3D characters don't mesh well with them at all.







◁ After numerous attempts on many social networking sites, this woman found love on creepythingsdate.com.

Knights Contract

Immortality made us want to die

Info

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev Namco Bandai
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like listening to a cover of "Witchy Woman" sung with a German accent.

Living forever ain't all it's cracked up to be. Just ask *Knights Contract's* Heinrich. As an immortal, Heinrich can't die, but Gretchen—the resurrected witch he's bound to—can and frequently does. Playing as Heinrich, we're tasked with babysitting dear Gretchen lest she wander off into the middle of a fight and sit there until she dies. And while that's rough enough during standard melees, it's utterly devastating in boss battles, with Gretchen mindlessly martyring herself in countless game-ending ways.

Contract's duo isn't a complete bust, though. The ability to simultaneously utilize both Heinrich's strength and Gretchen's magic allowed us to devastate enemies in a brutal fashion. Unfortunately, the flow of the battles and Gretchen's stunning finishing moves aren't enough to overpower the linear "stop the villain from attaining ultimate power" storyline, the conventional action-adventure gameplay, or the near non-existent A.I.

If Gretchen had the brains to develop a survival instinct, maybe playing *Contract* wouldn't feel like an eternity. But what do you expect from a woman waiting for a knight to save her? ANNE LEWIS

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Spare Parts

Format **PSN** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone 10+** Dev **Electronic Arts** Dev **EA Bright Light**

As the excellent *Ratchet & Clank* series amply proves, collecting gadget upgrades and hunting down goodies while bashing in a few skulls is an enjoyable formula. However, *Spare Parts* is missing one key ingredient: fun. Whether playing solo or cooperatively, this robotic-themed action platformer feels like a lot of work with little reward. Things seem to start off on the right foot—lots of upgrades and collectibles to track down offer incentives to dive in with enthusiasm—but camera angle woes, repetitive combat, and sloppy platforming segments quickly ramp-up the frustration. Feel free to scrap this short, bland adventure. NATHAN MEUNIER

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Swarm

Format **PSN** Price **$14.99** ESRB **Teen** Dev **UTV Ignition Ent.** Dev **Hothead Games**

30
1,264,000
10,600
5
Bonus: 2.6X

A platform game turned war of attrition, *Swarm* requires players to safely navigate a pack of 50 Swarmites through levels brimming with spikes, explosives, and countless other implements of death. Successfully guiding the amorphous mob requires manipulating its shape and form, maintaining its speed and momentum, and managing the pickup-fueled point multiplier system. Points are essential as, irritatingly, a preset score requirement must be met before a subsequent level is unlocked. A strict focus on simple level survival might have alleviated frustration, but *Swarm* still provides a surprisingly challenging—and splattering—good time. ROGER BURCHILL

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Alien Breed 2 Assault

Format **PSN** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen** Dev **Team17 Software** Dev **Team17 Software**

There's nothing quite like a derelict spacecraft filled with dead bodies and swarms of flesh-hungry alien bugs to get the blood pumping. This top-down arcade shooter has a slow and steady pace that's a great match for its moody, sci-fi horror vibe. Exploring the decimated bowels of a massive ship while blasting away nasty alien beasties popping out of grates and dark corridors is straightforward but satisfying. Even if it doesn't push any major boundaries, this polished continuation of the *Alien Breed* series packs a visual punch and enough eerie bug-slaughtering action to keep the guns blazing for hours on end—assuming we can stay alive that long. NATHAN MEUNIER

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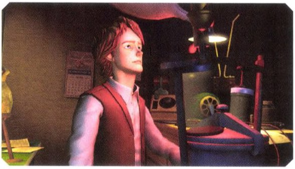
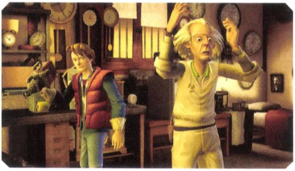


Time, according to Ben Jonson, is an old, bald cheater.



Back to the Future Ep. 1 It's About Time

Info

Format PSN
Pub Telltale Games
Dev Telltale Games
Price $19.99 (five-episode season)
ESRB Teen
It's like a trip in time. To the dentist.

We don't need roads where we're going: Dullsville.

A point-and-click third-person adventure, *Back to the Future: Episode 1: It's About Time* reunites '80s film icons Marty McFly and Dr. Emmett Brown for a tale set during America's Great Depression and its prohibition days. Doc's been jailed and McFly must team up with Brown's younger self to prevent the elder Brown's assassination.

The game hits all the right notes in terms of nostalgia, returning Brown, his dog Einstein, and McFly to the fore. But its play mechanics are clunky to the point where simple movement is a hassle. When McFly enters a new game area, the camera and perspective shifts ensure whatever direction he was shuffling in will be reversed, and even selecting objects in the backgrounds is an awkward affair. In-game puzzles do nothing to further the proceedings; it's astounding how *Time* presents almost exactly the same challenge multiple times and then repeatedly requires us to use the same tool to overcome it.

Time is not kind to our beloved friends. It's an adventure best left in our (forgettable) past. GREG ORLANDO

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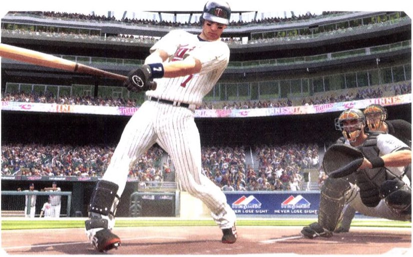
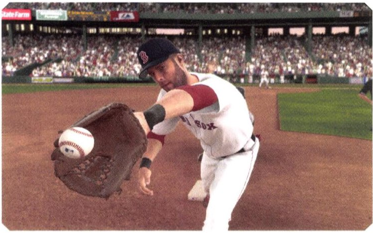
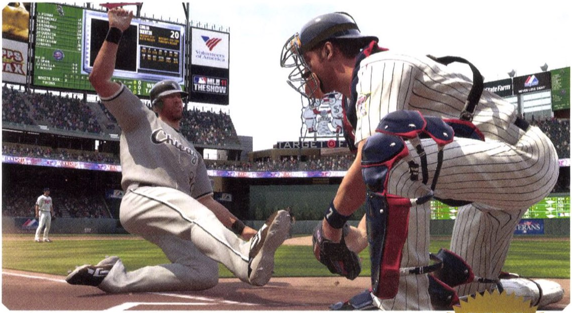




The graphics in *MLB 11: The Show* are simply astounding. Red Sox second baseman Dustin Pedroia doesn't look this realistic in *real* life!



In spring, a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of a multi-million dollar payroll.

MLB 11 The Show

The greatest Show on Earth

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Info

Format PS3
Pub SCEA
Dev San Diego Studio
Price $59.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like enjoying the Great American Pastime without paying $25 for parking.

As baseball fans bravely endure the winter doldrums, there's one statement we long to hear above all else: "Pitchers and catchers report." Ranking a close second in recent years: "The new version of *MLB: The Show* is available." Well, the new version of *The Show* is indeed available, and the talented folks at Sony's San Diego Studio have hit it out of the park yet again.

The headline this season is the addition of new control mechanics that use the Right-analog stick for hitting, pitching, and throwing. Competing baseball franchises have attempted this in the past, but *MLB 11* marks the first instance we didn't want to revert to traditional button controls after five minutes. That's still an option, of course, and the game plays as great as ever the old-fashioned way. The analog controls really do feel more authentic, though. They also require a greater level of concentration, which makes the game both more challenging and more engaging. Real-world hitters and pitchers get in trouble if they just start going through the motions, and now the same is true for gamers.

Beyond the new controls, *MLB 11* offers as robust a package as we'd desire in a sports game. In fact, we're hard-pressed to think of a single thing we'd want in a baseball simulation that isn't included here. Franchise mode gives armchair owners control over every aspect of an organization, from hiring international scouts to setting hot dog prices, while Road to The Show lets us take a single player from AA ball to the big leagues. Plus, never content to leave well enough alone, the developers continue to tweak and polish every facet of the game. Road to The Show, for instance, feels more organic than it did last year, rewarding overall performance rather than an arbitrary list of objectives.

If there's one area that could still use some work, it's the front-end interface. There's a lot of information to digest, and it's not always organized or explained very well. The in-game presentation, on the other hand, is pretty much flawless. Gorgeously rendered ballparks pop off the screen, players move naturally no matter the situation, and the incredible attention to detail consistently maintains the illusion of watching a real game. The broadcast team of Matt Vasgersian, Dave Campbell, and Eric Karros also deserves kudos. In too many sports titles, it's painfully obvious the commentators are reading off a script, but these guys intone like they would during an actual broadcast.

The new version of *MLB: The Show* is available. Play ball. **ROBERT STEVENS**

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GUITAR WORLD LICK OF THE DAY

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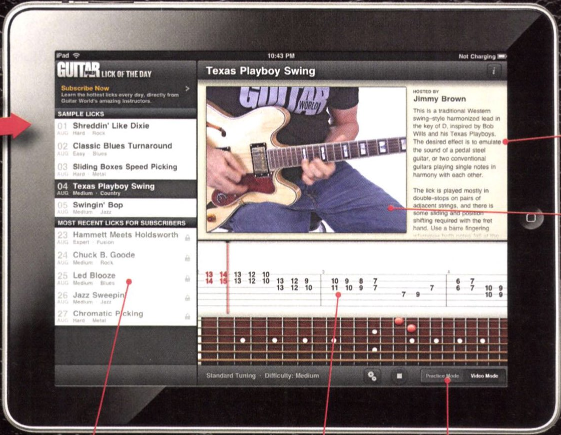
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Texas Playboy Swing
i
HOSTED BY
Jimmy Brown
Standard Tuning · Difficulty: Medium
Practice Mode
Video Mode

This is a traditional Western swing-style harmonized lead in the key of D, inspired by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. The desired effect is to emulate the sound of a pedal steel guitar, or two conventional guitars playing single notes in harmony with each other.

The lick is played mostly in double-stops on pairs of adjacent strings, and there is some sliding and position shifting required with the fret hand. Use a barre fingering

Performance notes written by GUITAR WORLD

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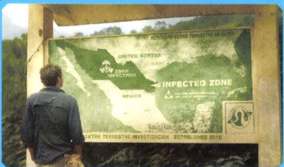

Monsters

Here be octopi-aliens

Info

Price $29.98
Director Gareth Edwards
Starring Scoot McNairy, Whitney Able
Rated R
Extras Director/cast commentary, behind-the-scenes featurettes, deleted and extended scenes.

The biggest problem with *Monsters*, Gareth Edwards' stunning sci-fi debut, is the title. While the name is certainly apt, it implies all the wrong things for people who might just pick up the movie at random. Tense, involving, and interesting, *Monsters* does have Godzilla-sized, octopi-with-legs space aliens, but the creatures are hardly the focus of the story.

This is indie sci-fi, not horror, and the excellent creature effects are used sparingly. The premise works well within the budget. Several years after a NASA probe infected with alien life crashes in Mexico, half of the U.S. and Mexico has become a quarantine zone overrun with 100-feet-tall octopi. The United States has built a giant wall on its side, but the military is losing the war on driving them back. Amid this backdrop, a jaded photojournalist is tasked to bring the daughter of his media mogul boss home through the alien-infested zone.

The bulk of the movie focuses on the relationship between the two leads. Both start out as typical stereotypes—he's snarky, cynical, and a narcissist; she's a rebelling rich, blonde daddy's girl. *Monsters'* magic is how it turns cliché into fully fleshed out, likeable characters without ever wading into the waters of trite emotions that a big budget movie would bathe in. Still, the pacing is slow, and it's well into the movie before the protagonists even get into the quarantine zone.

Yet *Monsters* manages to be consistently suspenseful in the same manner as *Jaws*. The aliens are seldom seen, but anytime danger crops up, we care enough about the characters to fear for them. Even when there's a good view of the beasts, it's not merely meant to frighten, but to add some dimension to them as well. There are thematic undercurrents of the evil of the media, the military response, and immigration issues, but none of it is too preachy.

The great presentation and a terrific soundtrack round out the movie, with extras including an engaging and interesting commentary with the director and the two leads, several making-of shorts, and deleted and extended scenes. Those who've enjoyed movies like *District 9*, *Moon*, and *Sunshine* should put *Monsters* at the top of their Blu-ray viewing pile.

JASON D'APRILE

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Let Me In

A vampire movie that doesn't suck

Info

Price $39.99 **Director** Matt Reeves **Starring** Kodi Smit-McPhee, Chloe Moretz, Richard Jenkins **Rated** R **Extras** Director's commentary, featurettes, deleted scenes.

Hollywood has a long tradition of redoing foreign films, so when the strikingly beautiful and original Norwegian vampire film, *Let the Right One In*, got such deserved press here, it was a short trip to a remake. The result is *Let Me In*, and it's shockingly great.

An apparent labor of love for director Matt Reeves—who showed a lot of promise with the overhyped yet underwhelming *Cloverfield*—*Let Me In* is an Americanized version of the grim and disturbing foreign film and novel. But that's not a bad thing. Moving the setting to 1983 New Mexico, the story of the relationship between Abby (a forever 12-year-old vampire girl) and Owen (a disturbed and bullied boy) is poignant, tragic, scary, and unsettling. Reeves has left the original story almost entirely intact, yet made a few meaningful changes that make this version absolutely worth watching.

There's a backdrop of themes that still resonate in the current day: the brutality of schoolyard bullies, the pain of a troubled childhood, and surviving however possible. For all that can be read into the subtexts, the heart of the story is about a boy and a girl who find each other under trying circumstances. As with its foreign version, there's no doubt that Abby is a true monster, yet she's a remarkably sympathetic one. Owen is just the opposite. He's pathetic and pitiful, and desperately trying to become a monster just so his classmates will stop brutalizing him.

Beyond the involving characters and script, Reeves takes the profoundly lonely and beautiful visuals of the source material to heart. The movie is gorgeously shot, and the mostly nighttime scenes are pristine on Blu-ray. Reeve's commentary is dry but informative. There are several interesting behind-the-scenes and making-of shorts, along with deleted scenes as well.

Even for those who've seen the original foreign film multiple times, *Let Me In* is worth adding to a Blu-ray collection. It's a remake, sure, but also a remarkable and distinctive work in its own right. JD

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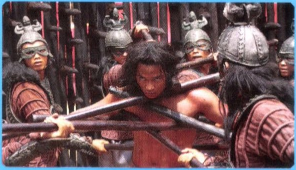
Blu-ray Roundup



Ong Bak 3

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

One of the craziest martial arts film in years, this sequel adds a mix of fights, bizarre mystical mumbo jumbo, and overly dramatic acting. But Tony Jaa's Thai fighting style is still awesome, the Thailand backdrop is gorgeous, and the movie is brutal. It's strange stuff, but for those who've stuck with the series thus far, don't stop now. 7

Dead Space Aftermath

Price $34.99
Rated Not Rated

This animated movie bridges the gap between the *Dead Space* games, introducing some of the sequel's characters while filling in plot holes. It's dark, violent, and unpleasant, just like the game. And we mean that in a good way. 7

Futurama Volume 5

Price $29.95
Rated Not Rated

The resurrection of the underrated cartoon series deserves celebration and this laugh-filled 13-episode collection is terrific. There's even crazy commentary for each episode, along with some primo extras. Long live *Futurama*! 8

Justified

Price $49.95
Rated Unrated

Based on an Elmore Leonard short story, *Justified* is gritty, violent, smart, and insanely watchable. It might not be from HBO, but it's as entertaining as *Deadwood*. In fact, we recommend both shows for a perfect double feature. 8

Want that

Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

AT&T
MOTOROLA

Motorola ATRIX

AT&T's first 4G Android 2.2 smartphone comes with a 2x1 GHz dual-core processor and Adobe Flash support. Power users can purchase a super-thin Laptop Dock, or the HD Multimedia Dock for a big-screen experience.

$200

(with two-year contract)

att.com

Elipson Planet L speakers

The Planet L speakers come in three lacquer finishes. Hang them from a sturdy ceiling or wall, or better yet place them on the optional custom-made stand.

$965/pair

elipson.com

Lark UP

Turn an iPhone or iTouch into an alarm clock by sticking it into the Lark Up's bedside base station. Or place the accompanying strap on the wrist and it'll gently vibrate when it's time to wake up—which is much more pleasant than a blaring alarm.

$99

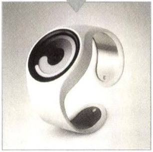
ourlark.com

Ziiiro Gravity Watch

The Ziiro Gravity watch has no hands and no numbers, just a constantly changing interaction between two rings to indicate the time. It comes in nine color combinations.

$140

ziiiro.com



Sound BLASTER
Sound BLASTER

Hoon

Excuse us, old chap, but might we interest you in a spot of *Super Street Fighter 4*? This luxury arcade stick is hand-assembled in a Parisian workshop and features a lacquered oak wood joystick, ostrich leather covering, and electronics courtesy of Sanwa.

$TBA

hoon.fr

Creative Sound Blaster Tactic3D Omega

The wireless Tactic3D Omega has a detachable microphone and 50mm drivers so every clink and clank comes through crystal clear.

$199

creative.com

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PS3
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GAME OF THE YEAR! AWARDS
TITANIC TERROR!
SHADOWS OF THE DAMNED
L.A. NOIRE
From the makers of GTA and Red Dead Redemption
Future
AWESOME REVIEWS
LittleBigPlanet 2
Mass Effect 2
Dead Space 2
KILLZONE 3 WWE ALL-ST
LETSTORM UNCHARTED 3

Rockstar aims to change the face of detective games and we investigate the best games of 2010.

We made LetterTron, and we made LetterTron mad. Make LetterTron happy with letters. Or else!

Email us at **PTOM_letters@futureus.com** or write to PTOM, c/o Future US Inc., 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

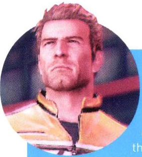
Blue skies?!

In your article about *Killzone 3* (2011's Hugest Games feature, Issue #41), there is a tiny screenshot that cannot belong to the *Killzone* franchise. I mean, blue sky? In *Killzone*? Nonsense.

Are you trying to put fruits in my favorite franchise? Fruits are forbidden on Helghan. They only give bananas to the heavies to keep them angry.

MARC ST-ARNAUD QUEBEC, CANADA

Noted cryptologists; the guy who barks at us at the train station; even Roger "Moore" Burchill—who understands the binary language of moisture evaporators; and Question Mark (of Question Mark and the Mysterians) could pierce the subtle, and overt, craziness of your note. So we will conclude by saying yes. By which we mean sometimes.



More Love, Less Greg

You guys are amazing! Except Greg Orlando. Why? Well Greg is always quoting other stuff like in your *Dead Rising 2* review. Every time I read something from him I have an Encyclopedia Britannica by my side because half the time I don't understand what he is trying to say. Greg, this is PTOM, not *The New Yorker*. You are dealing with gamers here. So please save all that sophisticated bullsh-t. And write something that gamers can read. **ADRIAN LUNA, PARTS UNKNOWN**

Greg certainly is not as amazing, say, as Scott Butterworth, whose supernatural ability to produce maple syrup on demand never fails to amaze and astound us. But he's not all that bad, and we let him make his silly references to old poems and historical events because we think it's okay to challenge our readers now and again. There's nothing wrong with being educational and entertaining, after all.

The Tip Jar

I liked reading Jeff Rubenstein's behavior tips for PSN in The Big 10 (Issue #42). Here are some tips of my own for everyday PS3 usage:

1. Dead charge on a controller but you don't want to leave your PS3 on all day while you're at work? Charge it on your PC/laptop.
2. Dead Bluetooth headset? Buy a cheap $15 Logitech USB Headset that has a decent 12-ft. wire as a back-up.
3. Live in the boonies with no high-speed internet availability? Try a mobile broadband N-class router and run a connection cord from the router to your PS3.

J.BIRD PARTS UNKNOWN

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Thanks for the tips. And we have an extra bit of advice for you: When the man asks you if you want to take on "The Genius" Lanny Poffo in a poetry deathmatch held inside a steel cage at Detroit's historic Cobo Hall, you tell him no thank you.

$$$ Blues

Why must videogames debut at $60? Game companies should know better than to price their wares so expensively. Wouldn't you think the game companies would lower their prices by, say, $20, so they can avoid losing out on money that then goes to the games being sold on eBay? Never mind the fact the prices get lowered about a year after a game is released, how about the prices be lowered once the companies have earned back the amount of money invested in their games, plus, say, an additional 50 percent?

MIKE CHRUSCIEL WESTFIELD, MA

Economics is a complex mistress, Mike, and we could talk about market demand, profit margin, and cost of game development (a lot of people work a very long time on each game), but we all were either asleep or, possibly, dead when they taught this in economics class. But it might be of interest that, corrected for inflation, videogames have gotten cheaper, not more expensive. Games in ye olden days—think when Nintendo 64 and PlayStation and Sega Genesis were around—routinely sold for $65-plus. These days, that's like One Squintillion Dollars. Or roughly $100.

Ask R-star

Q **I see a lot of people are writing in to bring back old game favorites, along with developers coming out with new versions of old games. Is there any chance we will ever see another *State of Emergency*?**

DOUGLAS PARTS UNKNOWN

A We forwarded your note to Rockstar Games' headquarters, and your letter was answered thusly, and with much vigor: "No comment." But Rockstar doesn't even own the license for the game anymore, so it's not likely we'll ever see a sequel. Oh, but rest assured Greg will see a sequel to *Emergency*. *In his mind!*

Max Pain Returns

It seems that all my favorite games are causing massive headaches these days. I play a lot of first-person shooters, racing games, and *Fallout: New Vegas*. FPSs are my favorite and they cause the worst headaches... especially during online sessions. I've tried everything from taking a 10-minute break at least once per hour to taking headache medicine to changing the lighting in my living room and nothing is working. I can't be the only person to experience this and so I'm wondering what is the root cause of these headaches and what are some possible solutions.

SETH MITTON MILTON, WA

Seth, some people are sensitive to first-person shooters, especially if the game's framerates are not stable or the camera tends to be jerky. In these cases, you might want to try an over-the-counter medication for motion sickness. It may help.

We referred your note to Oakland Children's Hospital, and received a reply from the neurology department. It reads: "Headaches could be stimulated by the extended periods of concentration and/or tension that some people experience with videogame play. Also some people play for extended periods of time without adequate eating or drinking, which can also cause headaches. This individual should take longer breaks to see if the headaches resolve."

If the headaches do not resolve themselves, you should see a doctor, Seth. These headaches may be a symptom of a larger problem.

Little Big Trauma

I bought *LittleBigPlanet 2* and was dancing with joy until I came across something that scared me terribly... "Victoria the Baketress." She looks like an evil antagonist from one of those disturbing anime films, except she isn't a child-eating cannibal. If Scott Butterworth offers free counseling for these cases let me know, or else get Sony to send me one of those therapeutic penguins... Because Sony is just that awesome.

EMILY STURGEON NORTHERN CANADA

Sadly, Scott's therapy techniques are only good when pancakes are nearby.

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

Tactics Ogre

Tactics Ogre

Yes, it's my job to play games. (Well, sort of.) But this PSP strategy-RPG has become like a *second* job, what with its endlessly addictive battles. It's cut into all my other Et Cetera time, so it gets my nod for the month.

GARY STEINMAN

Game Dev Story

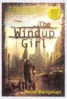
This downloadable iPad/iPhone game lets me design my own videogames and hire a crazy development staff of masked wrestlers, bears, and royalty. It's the best 99 cents I've ever spent.

GREG ORLANDO

TOMS Shoes

Just bought my first pair of TOMS! Ash waxed twill Cordones, to be specific. They seriously feel like slippers. Plus, as with every pair they sell, the company matched my purchase with a charitable donation. Very cool.

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



The Windup Girl

It's been a while since I've read a truly thought-provoking science fiction book. Author Paolo Bacigalupi's vision of an energy-depleted world ruled by calorie corporations and rife with bio-engineered plagues is both convincing and compelling.

ROGER BURCHILL

PSN
Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

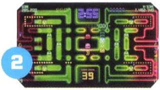
BEST FULL GAMES

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's humor.

9
Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**



Retro Revival

Pac-Man Championship Ed.

There'll always be a place in our hearts for gaming's gluttonous yellow goober—but nostalgia be damned, this retro homage offers a whole new frenetic take on the classic gameplay.

9
Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Namco Bandai**

Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9
Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**

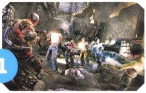
Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

The fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair taxing both the mind and reflexes.

9
Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

BEST DEMOS



First-Person Shooter

Bulletstorm

Packed with nut-shots, gratuitous cursing, and over-the-top limb dismemberment, this short but intense demo is brimming with warm bodies and creative ways to obliterate them. Humor, action, and bullets galore.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **People Can Fly/Epic Games**

Fantasy RPG Adventure

Faery Legends of Avalon

Don fairy wings and take to the skies for a taste of exploration and battle in this fantasy RPG. Adventuring in an old dragon's cave serves up ample helpings of faery magic and arrow-flinging action.

Pub **Focus Home Interactive**
Dev **Spider Studio**

Horror Rail-Shooter

Dead Space Extraction

Using the DualShock or the PS Move to blast away limbs from flesh-craving Necromorphs in this gritty HD port is exciting and chilling. This might be the only demo we've played that gives us nightmares.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Visceral Games**

RPG Platformer

Jikandia

The land of Jikandia needs saving, so grab some pixilated pals and get a taste of upbeat adventure in this colorful and quirky PSP demo. Bludgeoning the forces of darkness into submission has rarely been this charming.

Pub **Aksys Games**
Dev **Opus**

First-Person Shooter

Modern Combat Domination

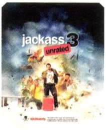
There's a lot of piping hot lead to spill into A.I. bots and human players alike in this 45-minute multiplayer demo. If that's not enough action, there's even a catastrophic missile launch to prevent.

Pub **GameLoft**
Dev **GameLoft**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're watching on our PS3 this month

"What did you think was gonna happen?"



Jackass 3 Unrated

ETA **March 8** Rated **Not Rated** Genre **Reality/Comedy** Studio **Paramount Pictures/MTV Films**

While we're not proud admitting it, *Jackass* does inspire a certain morbid fascination in us. Like voyeuristic moths to the car-wreck-flame, we're drawn to idiotic stunts involving high explosives, multiple stun guns, and a brimming airborne porta-potty. The adventures of Johnny Knoxville, Bam Margera, and crew loses the 3D tag here, but the unrated version offers loads of outrageous footage missing from the theatrical release. Consider *Jackass 3* moronic performance art at its finest.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

Dinner for Schmucks
RED
Machete
Takers
The Other Guys

TV Shows

Family Guy: Season 9
The Walking Dead: Season 1
Sons of Anarchy: Season 3
Young Justice: Season 1
Smallville: Season 10

BEST FREE STUFF

1

Sci-Fi Shooter

Mass Effect 2
Terminus Pack

This free pack offers up the slick M-490 Blackstorm "black hole" gun and the extreme condition-capable Terminus armor. More ammo, more speed, and more shields equals more sci-fi fun.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **BioWare**

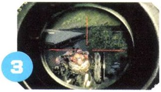
2

Life Simulation

The Sims 3
Eco Pack

Perfect for eco-warriors and friends of nature, this pack unlocks tons of environmentally conscious green-living items to deck out simulated humans with ample granola and urban hippie flair.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **The Sims Studio**



3

First-Person Shooter

Crysis 2
Be the Weapon

When it comes to battling alien invaders bent on obliterating civilization, having options is a good thing. This sweet teaser trailer drops some knowledge on the many ways to dish out pain in *Crysis 2*.

Pub **Electronic Arts**
Dev **Crytek Studios**

4

Stealth Action

AC: Brotherhood
Animus Project 2.0

The next round of DLC offers a spacious new map with plenty of room for free-running action. A new mode, Chest Capture, has one team seeking out treasure chests while the other defends them.

Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Ubisoft Montreal**

5

Dance Rhythm Game

Dance Dance Rev
Premium Pack

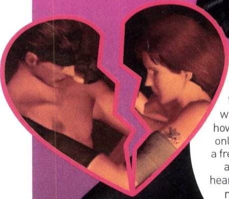
Hit the mat and dance the night away with this free pack featuring three of the game's most popular tracks in their entirety. Groove "thangs" are ready for some shaking, so let's get on it.

Pub **Konami**
Dev **Konami**

Bad Romance

On PS3, it's rarely happy ever after

WARNING: SPOILER ALERT!
PlayStation. The Official Magazine



Snake & Meryl

Metal Gear Solid 4

It must have been heartbreaking for Meryl. She's finally reunited with her supercrush Snake (guess how he got that name) after 10 years, only to discover he's now armed with a free bus pass, a Tom Selleck 'stache, and a Foxhound pension plan. So heartbreaking that she ends up getting married to that annoying Johnny kid with the IBS. Still, there's always Mei Ling, right Snake?

Batman & Catwoman

Batman: Arkham City

With enough rubber, latex, and battery-powered gadgets to put the back room of an adult "toy" store to shame, these two seem to have it made. But Bats' do-gooding tendencies come between him and the feisty feline, while Catwoman's penchant for pilfering exotic gems means she's a pain to shop for at Christmas time.

Scott Shelby & Lauren Winter

Heavy Rain

He's wider than she is tall and about five times her age—but so what? Scott and Lauren's tender romance is beautifully touching: a heart-warming reminder that even in the most desperate times, in the most horrid of situations, love can blossom. What's that? It turns out he's utterly depraved and disturbingly evil? Oh.

Nathan Drake & Chloe Frazer

Uncharted 2: Among Thieves

Okay, so she puts out in her first cutscene, looks great when going up ladders, and helps Drake battle his way through hordes of Serbian henchmen. All the same, Chloe was never going to win out over Elena Fisher in the eyes of PS3's most eligible bachelor—which, admittedly, might have a more than a little to do with her shooting him in the guts.

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